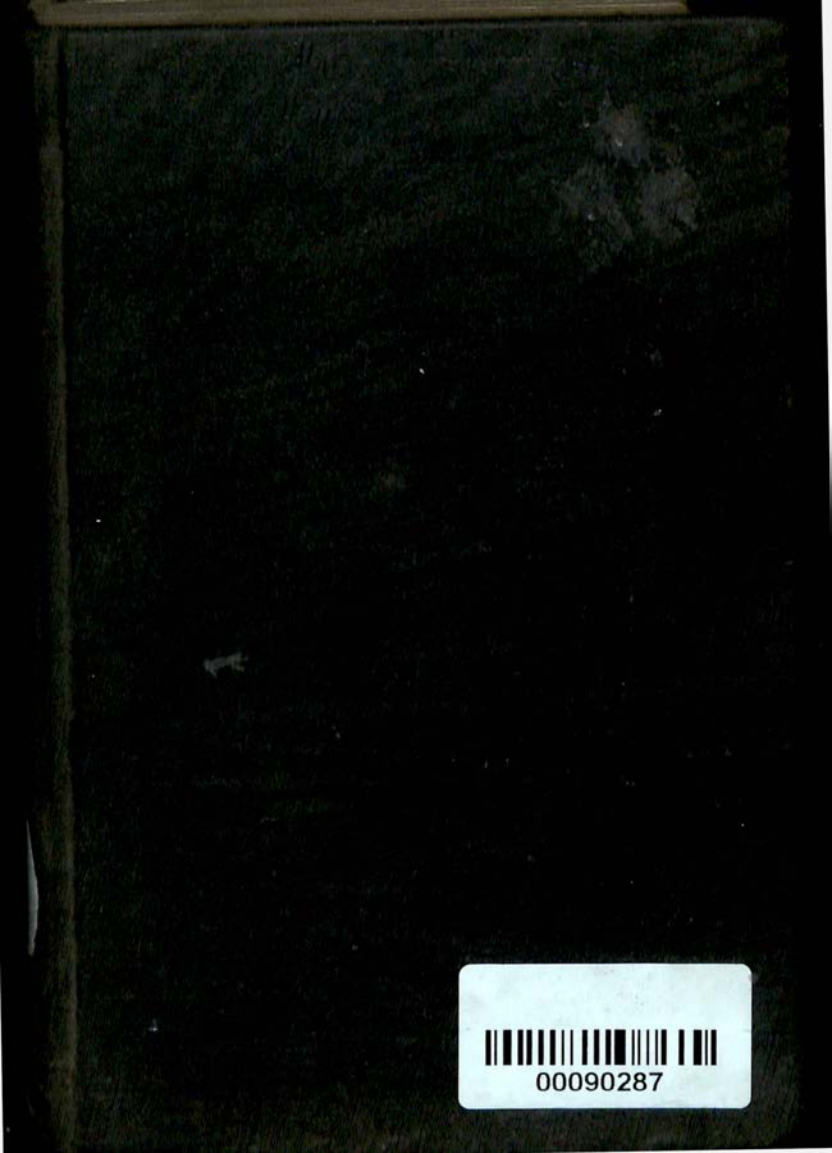
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—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

SELMIN OF SELMINGFOLD

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BY

BERTRAM MITFORD

Author of "The River of Unrest," "The Heath Hover Mystery" "A Dual Resurrection," "Ravenshaw of Rietholme," etc., etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE CHALK-PIT	9
II.	SELMINGFOLD	19
III.	THE PICTURE	28
IV.	THE SEQUEL	38
V.	THE ENSCOTTS	48
VI.	DRIFTING CHANCE	58
VII.	WATER AND LEAP	67
VIII.	"EXCALIBUR POOL"	77
IX.	MIMOSA ROAD, HAMPSTEAD	88
X.	THINGS MOVE	99
XI.	THE CHALK-PIT—AGAIN	110
XII.	"——— BY DURWARD"	121
XIII.	THE COMING OF THE FILGAYS	131
XIV.	IN THE MOONLIT WOOD	139
XV.	HALF A DAY	150
XVI.	THE OTHER HALF	160
XVII.	AND THE CLOSE	171
XVIII.	THE COMING OF THE SHADOW	180
XIX.	"SUMMER HAS STOPPED"	191
XX.	A DARK OPERATION	201

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI.	THE SHADOW	211
XXII.	IN PROFUNDO	220
XXIII.	NEWS—FOR TWO	229
XXIV.	OF A MEETING	239
XXV.	SOUND SENSE	249
XXVI.	WAIF	259
XXVII.	DURWARD OF SELMINGFOLD	268
XXVIII.	FOUR DAYS	278
XXIX.	NEWS—FOR THREE	293
XXX.	DURWARD'S PROPHECY	304
XXXI.	CONCLUSION	315

Selmin of Selmingfold

CHAPTER I.

THE CHALK-PIT.

"THIS ought really to be safe-guarded by a strong fence," said Selmin, meditatively. "It's beastly dangerous as it is. Imagine a runaway horse."

"Oh, you don't get runaway horses hereabouts," answered a voice behind him, whose owner was busily engaged shielding a match to light his pipe.

"I don't know. What about somebody out with hounds; some woman or girl, perhaps, who has insisted on riding a mount she can't hold at a pinch?"

"Yes. I hadn't thought of that," said the voice from behind, between furious puffs in an effort to keep alight a couple of sparks, the result of five matches expended against the force of the fresh sea breeze sweeping straight off the Channel up four miles of down-land. "But would any sort of rail stop it?"

"I think so. It might cause a swerve—if substantial and well tarred."

"This"—of the first word above, indicated a well-nigh perpendicular chalk cliff dropping down some sixty feet to the hollow of one of those disused chalk-pits so common along the South Downs—only this one was deeper than most of them. Selmin, standing on the very brink, looked over and shook his head.

"Don't stand so confoundedly near," said the voice behind, with a curious sort of tremor in it. "Man alive, you ought to know how slippery this turf is!"

"Oh, yes. But it's all right as long as you do know. I'm accustomed to heights by the side of which this one is a mere stepping stone."

"Still, sixty or seventy feet may be as effective as six or seven hundred," and again a strange, tremulous anxiety under-ran the tone, and the quick, feverish puffs at the pipe, while match after match was struck by its utterer, conveyed no impression to Selmin as he stood there on the very brink—slippery turf and all—gazing somewhat dreamily out on the expanse before him.

It was a glorious expanse of down, billowing away in green smoothness, to lose itself on the misty skyline. Here and there its humping uniformity was relieved by a clump of trees, stunted and side-forced by the continuous assaults of fierce south-westerly gales, or by the white glimmer of the face of a similar chalk-pit far or near; and away beyond, some three or four miles at the nearest point, the

glistening wavelets of the summer sea danced and flickered in the unclouded sunlight, to lose themselves in their turn in the distance of the dimming haze. A skylark sprang on high, filling the glorious air with jubilant melody, and a couple of wheatears flicked impudently from chalk fragment or rabbit burrow. A wondrous expanse of solitude and restful vastness, and this was the aspect that came home to Selmin as he stood there drinking it all in. He was a man who been more than once in peril of his life—yet, at that moment, he was standing in the deadliest peril of all.

The man just behind him, his friend, and near relative, had let fall his pipe on to the noiseless turf and was standing, his face pale, and his eyes glowing, as he sent one quick, furtive look from side to side. One step forward, a push, a seemingly accidental lurch, and——

Yes, it was his opportunity. Then the obsession of his life would be realised. He would be a fool to let such an opportunity slip, an opportunity which for facility, and, above all, absolute safety, would almost certainly never occur again. He would not let it slip.

One step forward would do it. But—he could not take that one step forward.

He tried to, yet he could not. Some unseen Power of the Air—whether of darkness or of light—held him back, seemed to press upon him as with uncalculated tons of resistance. He looked up, he looked down.

Nothing was visible, but it seemed that an

invisible hand of iron resistless strength was holding him back. He licked his dry lips and his face went nearly as white as the chalk lying beneath at their feet. But it held him back, and he realised that it did. He was not superstitious, quite the reverse; but at that moment he realised that there were forces which were outside ordinary nature as vividly as any man ever realised such before.

"It's glorious—glorious!" went on Selmin. "I've seen some parts of the world, but I'll defy any of them to outdo this splendour of a perfect English summer day. Why, Jack"—turning suddenly—"what's the row? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

The voice was full of real concern, held a startled note even, as he took in the livid look stamped upon the countenance of his friend and relative.

"I don't know—about ghosts," muttered the latter, in a dry, husky, jerky tone. "I warned you, mind—warned you that that turf is most deadly slippery, and yet you would stand there with one foot, so to say, actually dangling over that beastly precipice. Well, to have to stand watching a man—a fool—doing that, is enough to make one feel queer. Gets on one's nerves, you know."

Selmin was fully astonished, and looked it.

"Nerves!" he repeated. "Well, I should never have supposed that a man whose profession was more or less cutting and wounding could ever possibly suffer from such disadvantages."

"Well, you see," returned the other, pulling

himself together—and somehow the very illusion helped him powerfully in the process—"there are always weak points in everybody's armour, which may be taken to mean that it's one thing to be without nerves in one's professional routine, and quite another to be suddenly taken aback by an unwonted situation. See?"

Selmin said he did see, and in fact the somewhat weakness of the explanation did not come home to him—as indeed no reason existed why it should. But he still looked puzzled.

"I'm awfully sorry to have given you the jumps, old chap," he said. "But, of course, I never thought——"

"Well, you did. Perhaps if it had been anyone else——. But we can't spare you."

The words were uttered quickly; and, strange as it may seem in the face of the foregoing, the speaker meant them, and that thoroughly. There was no hypocrisy about them. His was a curiously complex character, as will be seen hereinafter, and now that the psychological crisis was weathered, he felt unfeignedly glad.

"The best thing we can do," said Selmin, "is to drop down upon Warnington, and take in a 'peg' at the 'Shepherd and Dog,' to help us on our way home. Panting up these Downs makes one pretty dry at any time."

"Yes, that's not a bad idea," assented the other.

As the two men turned to begin their descent, the panorama mapped out in front of them was one not to

be surpassed in the world for its vast and reposeful beauty. Field and woodland lay, from that height seemingly far more level than was really the case; the high, irregular hedges showing a darker line of green upon the emerald of the meadows, or the sage green of the not yet ripening corn; red roof of snug farmhouse or nestling cottage; quaint old church tower standing squat and square in its masses of protecting elms; a streak of compact white vapour where a distant train rushed across the fair champaign, and here and there a great pond glistened in the sunlight like a sparkling eye. Here, too, an old windmill with torn sails, stood forth like a stranded and hoary wreck, and upon the air was wafted now and again the sweetest of all country scents—that of new-mown hay. Lark song, too, gushed in plenteous melody from the blue overhead, with the richer, ever-varying throat note of the thrush, and even now and again the—now trebled—call of a belated cuckoo.

"Right about this turf being abominably slippery, old chap!" cried Selmin with a laugh, as his friend's footing slipped from under him, resulting in an involuntary seat, where the side of the steep down, in common with other scarps both near and far, swept headlong to meet the green leafiness which surged to their bases, also near and far, like the sea against the foot of its restraining cliffs. "I believe you were right as to the risks I was taking just now." But little did he guess the double import that his words bore to his companion.

The hamlet of Warnington, nestling at the foot

of the Downs, was one of those spots which should have been the joy of landscape painters, though known to few, if any of them. Every cottage was a picture in itself, with its high-pitched, irregular-gabled roofs, and the bright patches of its vari-coloured garden, and the "Shepherd and Dog" was a typical hostelry of any age you please. Two ancient rustics, who had not yet discarded the old-time smock, seated on a bench outside, with their blue and white beer mugs in front of them, mumbled a greeting as the pair entered.

"I wish this was on my place, Jack," said Selmin, as they entered. "I love these quaint old country pubs, and this is one of the quaintest. But it's a trifle too far ever to be brought into it."

The other assented. But there was just that in the words "my place" that sent his thoughts back to the top of the Down again, and put to flight all the subsequent vein of thought which had succeeded the psychological moment. This, however, he did not suffer to appear.

There was a delightful old orchard attached to the village inn, and on a plank seat beneath the apple trees the two sat, enjoying something cool and fresh and sizzling that sparkled in long tumblers.

"This is very perfect," remarked Selmin, blowing out a blue cloud of smoke. "We are just healthily enough in exercise to enjoy a rest, and our two-mile walk home will be a delight. Now look at the light and shade, with each sweeping spur of Down as the sun gets further and further behind it. And the air!"

"And the midges?" laughed the other. "They're simply devouring my symmetrical calf, although my stockings are not thin," and he picked up one knickerbockered leg and began rubbing vigorously.

"'Physician, heal thyself,'" quoted Selmin. "I'm surprised at a medicine man like you, Jack, thinking to remedy midge-bites by scratching them. But I suppose it's the case of 'out of office hours,' eh?"

John Durward laughed, too. "I suppose it is," he said. "Well, you've been in parts where two mosquitoes between them can carry off one of your boots according to the well authenticated travellers' yarns, so our midges don't count. I tell you what it is, though, old chap, you ought to turn brush-dauber with all your eye for scenic effect, and light and shade."

"Too late. Wasn't caught young enough. Half wish I had been. But I prefer all the said effect at first hand, and I never yet saw the part of the world where you get it better than in this."

"Well, we medicine men haven't time for anything of the kind. Our time—the whole twenty-four hours through—is anybody's but our own."

"Yes—yes—of course," rejoined Selmin with some trace of perturbation, then adding heartily, "Well, you are the useful ones of this world, anyway."

The other said nothing, only knocked out the contents of his pipe somewhat vigorously upon his heel. Then they talked about other things, leisurely, lazily, while revelling—on the part of one all un-

consciously—on the golden glories of the cloudless summer evening.

"I suppose we'd better get under way," said Selmin. "Another small peg before we start won't hurt. Come along."

They went round to the front of the inn. A third ancient rustic had joined the original pair and was fingering his striped beer-mug.

"Fine evening, genelmen," he began.

They returned his greeting, and he went on.

"I seed 'ee to tarp o' the daown just back. Sakes, but 'ee was near t'edge o' the pit. Tarr'ble straight drap there."

"Where were you?" said Durward, with a sharpness of which he was not altogether conscious.

"Where wur I? Whoy, not fur. I'd bin talking to shepherd, and then I seed 'ee. I was that glad when 'ee moved away. That tarf be tarr'ble slippery, sure-ly."

"You're right. That's just what I said," returned Durward crisply; but his face had taken on something of the pallor which had come over it when they had been standing upon the spot named. So this old man had been watching them all the time! Heavens! But that restraining influence—whether of the Powers of the Air, of darkness or of light—had been exercised in his own favour, too! "Here," he went on, to the landlord, who appeared at that moment with their own refection. "Set up another pint for our old friend here. I think he could do with it."

Whereupon the ancient's wooden face split slowly,

displaying a trio of yellow tombstones, and he answered with a heartiness, not undashed with gratitude, that he shared the last speaker's opinion.

But Selmin had hardly given an ear to any of this. His eyes and his mind were alike taken up with the golden glories of earth and air; for, though not new to it, he was new to the realisation that a fragment of the former now belonged to him—that he owned a fraction of the earth's surface, and it a very beautiful one.

CHAPTER II.

SELMINGFOLD.

For charm of situation Selmingfold would be hard to beat. It stood on high ground with a direct fall of woodland to the foot of the Downs, the nearest point scarcely three miles distant—as the crow doesn't fly. Opposite, Canonbury Link, with its wind-swept circular copse, a landmark for miles and miles; then away to the left, in spur-cut crescent, beyond where the railroad line cleft its way to the sea, Croftonbury Hill, and beyond that again in the distance the blunt corner head of Swaytheling Beacon and between the rising rampart of smooth green and the sloping woods, an expanse of dyke-intersected water-meadows dappled with kine and well-conditioned sheep. When the evening sunlight fell searching and clear the bold line of old Roman encampments stood forth frowning and still aggressive; as in the hoary past when the Latin invader was careful to keep himself on high open position ever watchful of the skin-clad savage horde in the forest weald beneath.

It was a picturesque house was Selmingfold, of no particular architecture. Part of it was old, but most of it fairly modern, and it was hard to say where the one began and the other ended. The impression, however, conveyed was that of a mass of gables, angulating against a background of oaks. In front, a garden, which would have shocked the eyes of a Scotch and scientific gardener, dropped down to the edge of the wood beneath, but the prodigal wildness and lack of mathematical laying out of this was just what delighted its new owner, and the profusion of colour, with no particular attempt at regularity, appealed to him irresistibly. He liked the winding paths, and the great irregular flower beds, and would not have had them patterned and close-trimmed for the world. But the said profusion of colour made a glorious foreground to the expanse of rolling greenness which lay out for miles and miles beyond.

Selmin had led a more or less adventurous life in far countries, and when he learned that he had become the absolute owner of this beauty spot in the fairest section of the earth's surface, no one could have been more surprised than himself. He could hardly believe in his good fortune. In the days of his youth—and now he was a trifle nearer forty than thirty—he had looked upon Selmingfold as a sort of Mecca, and every stay he had made there was something to be looked back upon with a lingering affection of regret—of regret because a thing of the past. Every stick and stone of the place, every point of woodland and down, was to him

in the course of his far wanderings fraught with associations almost sacred, as hallowed by distance and recollection. And now it was all his—all his. There were times when awaking in the morning he could hardly believe it; took some minutes of looking forth from the window upon the fair panorama, spread out in the glory of the early day, before he could realise it, in fact.

We said that he was never more surprised in his life than on receiving the news of his good fortune. For it had depended entirely on the caprice of an eccentric and cynical great uncle. John Durward, his first cousin, was slightly older than himself, and had always been reckoned first favourite with the old man. But the latter had decided upon him, Selmin, for no more solid reason—as set forward in his documentary dispositions—than that Selmin of Selmingfold sounded better and more appropriate than Durward of Selmingfold, wherefore the latter had found himself cut out—to him as unexpectedly as to the other when he found himself cut in—with a very fair legacy certainly, as a solatium—but—still cut out.

The strange part of it is that on the face of this the two men continued the best of friends. There was a little soreness at first on the part of Durward, but not to last. Selmin had insisted upon him making the place his home, entirely and unreservedly, always and whenever he felt inclined. They had been friends from boyhood; why should this come between them now? Durward had his profession, a substantial one, whereas Selmin had none. He

had done various things in the Colonies; up to-day, down to-morrow; but only living from day to day. He could not afford to perform such a magnificently quixotic thing as to waive his right in favour of anybody, besides he was far more wrapped up in the place than ever the other had been. All of which Durward came to recognise, and the friendship between them, hardly interrupted, grew closer than ever.

Durward, as his friend's allusions should have made plain, was a medical man by profession. He had had an average London practice, which he had just disposed of, with an eye to specialising in surgery, towards which his leanings inclined. For the present he was filling up his time at Selmingfold, greatly to the satisfaction of his relative, and to his own enjoyment of a thoroughly free and protracted holiday.

Personally he was a well-knit man of medium height, with a strong face and heavy, dark moustache. Capability and resourcefulness seemed stamped upon him, in facial expression and in every movement. Yet he had his imaginative side and perhaps the loss of Selmingfold, which had come upon him as a wholly unexpected blow, was the point wherein this side told. It fastened upon his mind until little by little it had become an obsession—a dangerous obsession, as we have seen by the foregoing.

And yet, on the face of it, he felt a very real friendship, even affection, towards his more fortunate relative. The mood would come over him by fits,

by gusts; and would be specially evoked by situations such as that in which we first saw them together. When such a psychological moment had passed he congratulated himself that it had. But any passing situation which might work out by itself or wherein a touch from outside agency might remove the man whom he thought had supplanted him—and there are such situations, generally unthought of, even in quiet everyday English life—seemed to arouse a hot cloud within his brain, as though he were under some demoniacal possession; and therein the obsession would become dangerous—very.

* * * * *

"What shall we do to-day, Jack?" said Selmin, on the morning after their ramble on the Downs, as they lit their cigars after breakfast in the bright, cheerful dining-room, with its glorious outlook on sunlit wood and meadow and hill. "Cycle ride, horse ride, Shanks-his-mare ride, or no ride? What?"

"Well, I think the last—for the first half of the day anyhow, since you put it straight," answered Durward. "I suggest a quiet loaf around in the sunshine, and an hour of letter-writing before lunch."

"Suit me to a hair," returned the other. "Hallo! someone must have been fiddling with those things. Some of them'll be down in a minute."

"Those things" represented part of a "trophy" of savage weapons which adorned the wall opposite the window, and which Selmin had collected during his wanderings. Some of them had got displaced.

"I've very carefully warned those stupid servants

to let them severely alone," went on Selmin, rising and going over to put the disarrangement right. "I've filled them up with the most blood-curdling yarns as to the green deadliness of those Bushmen arrows, with their combination of snake and vegetable poison, for instance; but it seems no good. They will meddle with them."

"I can't think why you keep such infernal dangerous things within every and anybody's reach, as I've often told you. It's positively criminal," returned Durward, and, as he spoke, he felt conscious that his face was paling, and that that same possession was coming over his mind that had taken hold upon it the day before on the brink of the chalk cliff. He sat rooted to his chair watching, with a horrible fascination, the efforts of his relative to restore the symmetry of the disturbed trophy, without going to the trouble of getting something to stand upon in order to facilitate that feat.

"They're not within everybody's reach," answered Selmin, without turning round. "That's why I've hung them so high up—— Good Lord!"

The last was a break off, as he made a quick step backwards. A wicked-looking battle-axe with a crescent-shaped blade, and a couple of solid assegais came clattering to the ground. With them the shriller clatter of three or four harmless-looking little sticks.

"That was a near shave," ejaculated Selmin, with a laugh not altogether mirthful. "Man alive, but a touch from one of those, then—good-night! Why, Jack! You do look scared!"

A frightened pallor had come over Durward's face. He sat as though glued to his chair.

"Burn the damned things, Selmin," he said, in a voice that was almost a deep growl. "For God's sake burn them—now and here."

The other laughed carelessly, then took up one of the things. A miserable little reedstick tipped with metal—what was there so formidable in it? Well, the metal of the tip was hardly visible through its coating of a dried greenish substance. But he handled it carefully.

That awful hot cloud was sweeping over Durward's brain as he looked. One scratch, one mere accidental scratch, and Selmingfold was his. He got up, almost violently, and rang the bell. Selmin hardly noticed this. Durward rang the bell as a matter of course if he wanted anything.

"Get a lot of fire-lighting wood," he said, as it was answered. "Stuff that will burn, and burn at once, and plenty of it. And—look sharp!"

"Yessir," answered the man, looking a trifle surprised. But Durward was a doctor, and if he thought anything at all about it, he concluded that the stuff was wanted for some experiment.

"Now then," went on Durward, when the man had gone out again. "We'll make a holocaust of these things." And he piled the wood into the empty grate.

"I believe you're right, old chap," said Selmin, still holding one of the arrows in his hand, though carefully. "They *are* most infernally dangerous things to have about. But they will soon be extinct

as curios because the people who made them are—almost. How about sending them to some museum instead?"

"No, no! Into the fire with them." And having started a great and crackling blaze, he took the arrow from Selmin's hand, and carefully disposed it so that the poisoned tip should undergo the full effect of the flames. The others he treated one by one in similar fashion. There was not a fragment left. They were effectually consumed.

Selmin laughed.

"There goes the plum of my collection," he said. "I'll tell you what it is, old chap, I believe those things were an eyesore to you because none of you doctors have ever been able to discover the secret of that poison."

But the other did not at once respond to his mood.

"Perhaps," he answered wearily, but with the air of a man from whose mind a load had been lifted after hard and anxious attempts to lift it. And who shall say that such was not the case?

But, as he spoke, he knew that his all unconscious friend had escaped death, and that narrowly, twice within twenty-four hours. And he himself had escaped—what?

Out in the sunshine the episode was soon forgotten. As they paced up and down the level of the upper garden walk the contrast between the two men, to any character student coming suddenly on them, would have been marked. Selmin was the taller of the two, and as his clean-cut face, tanned to a healthy brown, and clear blue eyes spoke to the pink

of condition, so the supple, easy build showed in rather marked contrast to the more massive strength of the other. Yet he was not lacking in that by any means. But the face, though alert enough when anything occurred to rouse it, was, in repose, somewhat the face of a dreamer. And its owner had borne his part—and borne it well—under stress where rude hard knocks were given and taken. They formed a contrast, and a very distinct one, so much so that it would be hard to conjecture towards which of the pair the average feminine favour would be likely to incline. So far, however, the feminine element had not come into their calculations at all, nor as they strolled about in the all-sufficing ease and glories of the still summer morning had either the faintest of ideas that it ever would. In fact, they gave it not so much as a thought—which is the way in which the Finger of Fate wags.

CHAPTER III.

THE PICTURE.

"I'm afraid I shall have to run up to town for a day or two, Selmin," said Durward, as they sat at breakfast on the following morning, each with a scrap-heap of correspondence at his right.

"The deuce you will! That's a nuisance!" was the answer, and the speaker's countenance clouded. "What'll I do with myself all the time, by myself? Couldn't you get it all into one day? Doesn't matter if it's the latest train of all back."

"Afraid I can't. But, I say, old chap. I've been here a long time. I haven't come here to live, you know."

Selmin looked up quickly.

"That's how the cat jumps, is it?" he said, greatly wondering, for he had never heard the other take that tone before. "Well, you're talking bosh, Jack, and you know it. If you're going up on professional or any other business, why that's your look-out. But if you're only paving the way to clearing out because you've 'been here a long time,'

then it becomes mine—and I shan't take it well. How's that ? "

"Since you put it that way. But I said only for a day or two," returned Durward. "'Honest Injun.' It's really in connection with the new line I'm feeling after. So if you'll just run me up to East Welstead Station in time for the 10.30, I'll be back by the day after to-morrow, or the day after that at furthest. But why not take a run up with me, and get a room at the club for a night or two ? "

"Town ? Now ? Exchange all this for dust and wood-paving and hideous din, and general scorch and stuffiness ? No. I don't feel equal. But isn't it rushing it rather—for the 10.30, I mean ? "

"Oh, no. I'm all rolled up and ready. I say, though "—and here he broke off, as his glance travelled upward to the wall opposite. "We didn't complete our job yesterday. There's one of those infernal things left. I thought we'd burnt them all."

Selmin's eyes followed the glance. One of the deadly little Bushmen arrows still hung to the wall. It had become displaced, and hanging alongside of the string which held the other weapons, had passed unnoticed, by reason of its utter insignificance.

"I'm rather glad we overlooked it," he said. "I had qualms after doing away with the others. I felt something of what a rabid teetotaler *ought* to have felt, who had inherited a fine wine cellar and poured its contents out into the gutter. These things are jolly rare, you know, and just that one won't be dangerous. I'll take care it's properly fixed."

"Yes, do. Or, better still, chuck it into the fire, too," rejoined the other, getting up. "You wouldn't leave a loaded gun standing in a corner for the benefit of all comers, would you? Very well. That amounts to the same thing."

For the first time some trace of wonder came into Selmin's mind with regard to the consistency with which his relative harped on this not particularly important string. It seemed to him that Durward had set in to develop "nerviness" of late. Well, perhaps he had been having too long a spell of inaction. This run up to town might work off something of a cure.

"I suppose I shall have to set up a motor, Jack," he said, as later they went bowling along the splendid tarred road in a high dog-cart. "I'm rather skeery of it, though—not in these wide main-roads so much as in those narrow, snaky ones, which are really the best to drive through from a scenic point of view. I should probably start by killing somebody or myself. And they seem to entail endless bother and expense."

"Well, as to the first, you needn't send them along any quicker than you like. For the last, I'm afraid you're right."

It did not take long to cover the three miles and a half to East Welstead Station, and the train being not later than usual, they had ten minutes to spare. Afterwards Selmin, having loaded up a parcel or two which was in waiting, was conscious of a feeling of loneliness as he sent his fast trotting horse at a good pace homeward again. He would be alone

for the next few days, and he did not in the least relish being alone. Since he had returned to his native country and had taken possession of his all-unexpected heritage, he had become susceptible to loneliness to a degree which had never affected him in the farther quarters of the earth. It was a nuisance that Durward should have cleared out just then, he told himself, and he knew of no one whom he could get down at a moment's notice to supply his place. The few—the very few—men whom he would have liked to do so certainly could not.

Arrived home again, he strolled round to the keeper's. It was impossible to settle down to anything indoors on such a day as this. The keeper's cottage, like nearly every cottage in that South Country beauty spot, was an object of picturesqueness in itself, with its pointed gables and creeper-twined walls and leaded window-panes, and the glowing blotch of garden in front. From it a green meadow, studded with hen-coops and half-grown pheasant-poults, sloped down to a larch cover, vivid in its tassels of dazzling green, melodious with the soft cooing of wood doves. Here he found the keeper.

"They're rearing strong, Dayson," he said approvingly, with an eye on the poults. "You'll turn down a very respectable head, I'll bet."

"Ay, zur—middling'—middlin'. But——" And then he stopped and looked sour.

"But what?"

"Well zur, t'ain't for me to zay, mebbe. But

we'd turn down a better 'ead if so's them what ought to keep out o' these 'ere woods kep' out o' them, as you might zay."

Selmin did not particularly like the keeper—but he had inherited him with the place. Dayson was a tall, spare ungainly old man, with close-clipped, mutton-chop, grey whiskers, and his new master was inclined to think him a little too off hand, and at times patronising. He had not been there in the old days, and now it seemed that he was assuming airs, a sort of contemptuous pity for the ignorance of one who had spent a large slice of his life in "furrin' parts." He was likewise constitutionally ill-conditioned, and did not get on at all well with the farmers and others, whose goodwill went very far towards the preservation of a respectable head of game. Now Selmin put down the old man's last remark, or hint, to a mere insatiate passion for grumbling.

"Who have you got in your eye now, Dayson?" he said carelessly, but attaching no importance to the answer. The old man peered up sourly.

"Them as ain't got no business—where they ain't got it," he answered. "Them as comes a pokin' about these 'ere woods, after flowers and sleepers* and burds' eggs, scarin' the burds 'ere and there, when they ought to be let alone. Them, too, as oughter know better, say I."

But he had struck an unsympathetic chord. Selmin had spent too much of his life in wild lands to take kindly to the idea of shutting out from any

* Dormice.

portion of his own those who came thereon for harmless and healthful pleasure.

"Lord, Lord! There's room for all, Dayson," he answered, with a sort of swelling at the heart as his gaze wandered round upon the summer loveliness of the landscape, which belonged to him —to him; was his own actual property. This fair fragment of the fairest section of God's world was his—his—and there were times when he could hardly realise it. "If an odd person or two wanders in and about the woods," he went on, "just for the pure pleasure of being there, or to collect flowers and dormice, and birds' eggs, as you say, why, in heaven's name, let them. They'll do no harm, and there's room for all."

"Room for all! Do no harm?" echoed the old keeper, in the last stage of amazed, even contemptuous wrath. "How am I going to keep my burds from straying, and show a middlin' head o' game come first October, what with men and women and dawgs—aye and dawgs—a drivin' them from right to left in all directions? Tell me that, Mus' Selmin. Tell me that." And the pucker of the old fellow's face took on a snarl that was positively venomous.

"Oh, it isn't so bad as all that. If people take a stroll along the covert paths and their dogs go yapping after a rabbit here and there, even if a cock pheasant or two does get up and flap away a hundred yards, why, there's no great harm done. It'll get him into training for when he's wanted to fly—that's all."

"'Tain't that, zur—tain't that," rejoined the old fellow, as shortly as he dared. "It's the disturbin' of the whole covert—that's what it is. I was readin' a book come last week, by one of the fust class authorities, and he ses, ses 'e, 'The fust essential to game presarvin' is repose.' That's what 'e ses, ses 'e. Repose!"

The triumph on the old man's face was very comical, as he fired off this shot. He went on—

"What be the use of them notice-boards, 'Trespassers will be parsecuted'—if so be they ain't to be parsecuted. They may as well all be knocked down, them boards. Answer me that, Squire. What be the use o' they? Answer me that."

"Well, knock 'em all down then, Dayson. You're welcome to, for all I care."

The old keeper could hardly believe his ears. He stared in a world of blank bewilderment at his master.

"What? And ain't none of 'em trespassers to be parsecuted—none of 'em. D'you mean that, zur?"

Selmin was struggling hard not to roar, as he composed his face to the most solemn, shut-in-a-door expression, as he thought.

"You don't seem to know your Scriptures at all, Dayson," he said. "The Scriptures say we must forgive people their trespasses."

The old keeper's indignant horror was so complete that the irrepressible twinkle in his master's eye while delivering this dictum passed entirely unperceived. With a nod the latter turned hurriedly to conceal the

splutter that would not longer otherwise be concealed, and went on his way. The other gazed after him open-mouthed.

"A Radical, that's what 'e be," he murmured to himself. "A red 'ot Radical, and a Methody, too. The Scriptures say trespassers mustn't be parsecuted. What's going to become of the game I'd like to know. Aye, I'd like to know that, sure-lye. Jos Dayson, lad, your days at Semmafold's numbered. Squire a Radical and Methody. Knock daown notice-boards —knock 'em all daown!"

And the speaker spat vehemently, as the only way of relieving his feelings he could think of.

The while his master, the "Radical and Methody," went strolling on. He opened a hunting-gate which led into the thick of a covert. Here a straight path had been cut, the trees overhead meeting so as to form a tunnel of radiant, sun-gilded greenery. Crossing the bed of a trickling rivulet, by a slippery bridge consisting of a single log and a very rotten handrail, he left the main path and struck down a much smaller one, which, in fact, was hardly a path at all. Here the damp moisture, yet not unfragrant, where the sun hardly penetrated, came to his nostrils.

"The devil fly away with that old fool and his croakings," he thought. "If an odd stroller here and there does take it into his or her head to wander along this sort of way, why not? Perhaps nearly all the year round they're stuck in the dust and stuffiness of some beastly town. They can go where they like, for all I care, so long as they don't come in gangs, and they're not likely to do that, for gangs don't stray far

off the highway and its pubs. I'll have all those silly notice-boards knocked down. What's a brace or two of birds, more or less, at the end of a day's bag, in comparison with a whole summer's day enjoyment to some wretched, overworked devil, to whom such a stroll around as I'm having now would be an event to be looked back upon—chalked with a red stone, as the old chestnut has it? No. As long as I've got a share in God's solid world, I shan't be the one to shut other people out of their share in its enjoyment." Whereby, it will be seen that though not a Radical or a Socialist, the new Squire of Selmingfold's line of life was exactly the reverse of that which tends to beget and foster Socialism.

He had got to this stage of his philanthropic musings when they were pulled up suddenly, as if with a round turn, and that by a noise. On the slope of the covert to his right broke out a series of shrill and peripatetic yaps, the excited yaps of a small dog in hot pursuit of something. He stood still. Here was a practical test for the theories he had been so glowingly formulating to himself. Here was an objective confirmation of old Dayson's grievance.

The sounds went zigzagging up and down the covert, now near, now farther away, then near again. But one sound was the rush of a much larger animal than that which was emitting its excited squeaks. Selmin resumed his way.

The path left the covert and the pedestrian came out upon the broad end of one of those large ponds which stud the map of the Weald like so many shining eyes. It was a beautiful spot. The smooth red

stems and blue plumage of tall Scotch firs lay mirrored in the surface, gnarled oaks too, and planes, rose from the profuse bracken bathing their stems, but the woodland was open in contrast to the thick closeness of the covert. Away, in a broad sheet between its overhanging bushes, to lose itself in a green-bordered curve in the distance, stretched the gleaming surface of the pond.

There stood there a figure, to which all this wildness of greenery formed a most effective background—the figure of a girl.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEQUEL.

SHE was standing, with her back to the watering, standing erect, gazing in the direction of the yapping sounds which were still to be heard, going strong, on the right of the path, from which Selmin had emerged —gazing anxiously too. She had a toy dog-whip dangling at her wrist, and from the butt-end of this she now began to blow a clear, shrill, carrying whistle. But it seemed of no avail; as is usually the case in relation to dogs under feminine control— or want of it. The anxiety on her face deepened, and she blew harder than ever.

The said face was a beautiful one. Straight, regular features of the Grecian type, the mantling colour coming and going, lustrous dark eyes and dark brown hair, with a natural wave in it, carelessly falling over both sides of the forehead, framed and kept in place by a wide-brimmed, very becoming straw hat. A rather tall figure, clad in plain walking costume, light blouse, and tailor-made skirt, and speaking of ease and grace with every slight move-

ment; then the woodland trees and sun-flecked bracken, and gleaming surface of the water for background, and—there you have the picture.

That was how Selmin took it in, at any rate, and he found it a striking and a vivid one. She flashed a quick look at him as he came into view, then in the excitement begotten of anxiety she opened upon him without ceremony.

"Have you happened to see two dogs anywhere near the way you came? They must have come very near you."

"I haven't seen them, but I heard them," he answered with a slight smile, as he raised his cap. Old Dayson's words came back whimsically to his mind—"What with men and women and dawgs—aye, and dawgs—a drivin' them from right to left in all directions." And then the anxiety in the face seemed to infect his, as he remembered how the noise made by the recalcitrant animals might well reach that worthy's ears; and that worthy had a gun, an unerring and resentful gun. He did not want that implement turned to account to exact vengeance for the mere chevying of a rabbit, to exact vengeance, too, on the probably cherished property of this striking and radiant vision which had thus suddenly risen up in his path.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "If only I could find some means of getting them to come back. There's an abominably crusty old keeper here in these woods, and he'd think nothing of putting a charge of shot into each of them."

The anxiety on Selmin's face deepened, for he

knew that was exactly the course old Dayson would be likely to take, in fact would be delighted to take.

"I'll see if I can find them," he said. And there and then he started off, more with the object of staying old Dayson's hand in time than with any idea of the possibility of being able to call off, or scare off, a couple of strange dogs in the excitement of a rabbit chase.

He plunged into the covert, but he had hardly gone a dozen yards before the two delinquents met him, trotting past, panting violently, and looking foolish. One was a red Irish terrier, one glance at which served to show him was of a pedigree breed, the other a fine, long-haired, and exceedingly handsome, black retriever. He turned back after them, feeling intensely relieved.

"Oh, you bad dogs!" the girl was ejaculating, as he rejoined her. "You bad, bad dogs!" and as she raised her toy whip, both slunk crouching and whining but keeping carefully out of reach—be it remembered they were dogs under feminine control. "You, Zulu," to the retriever, "lie down. Down, sir," making a cut at him which could hardly have hurt a fly. "Croom! you disobedient little beast! Would you?"

The smaller dog got it, and gave a yap, which stayed the next stroke. The spectator, looking on, was amused.

"You won't keep them in hand by those light measures," he said. "And you're right about that keeper. He's sworn death on dogs hunting in

coverts. He's no right really to shoot them, but—he does."

"Does he? Well, I'm glad to know he's no right to, because now, if he shoots mine, I'll have him prosecuted," answered the girl, and the mantling colour, born of resentful excitement, and the gleam that came into the normally soft and lustrous eyes, was a deepening of the revelation to the looker-on. "They do no harm if they do chevy a rabbit or two through the coverts here and there, and no one has any right to shoot them for it."

It was on the tip of Selmin's tongue to reply—

"Well, no one shall ever shoot them in these coverts," but he refrained. Instead, he said—

"I quite agree with you. Still, it wouldn't do to lay it down as a general principle, or every village or cottage lurcher cur would be let loose on a rabbit hunt at any and every time of the day or night, and, of course, that wouldn't do at all."

"Oh, I'm so glad you agree!" rejoined the girl. "Because I thought you men held everything to do with shooting so sacred, that whatever came within the slightest suspicion of interfering with it should be put out of the way without mercy. But perhaps you don't shoot."

Selmin smiled curiously.

"Yes, I do," he said. "But there are limits to everything. 'Live and let live,' as the old chestnut says, which may be taken to mean that I'm very glad your dogs have returned safe and sound."

"Well, I'll keep them on the lead next time I'm

here alone with them. Who owns this ground, by the way? Do you know?"

"Yes. It's part of Selmingfold."

"Oh, I know! That picturesque place just below the highest point on the Arpington Road. What a lovely place it is, and these woods—they are simply perfect. I never get tired of them."

If the faintest suspicion had entered Selmin's mind that this remark was thrown out in an invitatory sense it was only to be immediately dismissed. The girl was simply and entirely natural; so much was manifest at a glance. The two dogs, which had been taking a preliminary and precautionary sniff, were now thrusting their noses into his hand. He patted them and talked to them, and they, seeing their overtures of friendship so quickly responded to, became exuberant in their tail-waggings and squirmings.

"Well, thanks awfully for helping me," said the girl, making a move as if to depart.

"But, I didn't help you," he expostulated. "In fact, there wasn't scope for any aid at all."

"But you were going to, and the intention counts. Good-bye."

And with a little nod of the head, and flashing a quick, bright smile at him, she turned and set off at a fine, elastic, quick-step time down the ride. But the two dogs kept half wistfully looking back, as though wondering why he should remain behind.

Selmin pretended to be examining the sluice-gate of the pond, but in reality he was furtively watching the lithe, erect form until it was out of sight in the

turns and mazes of the bracken-fringed ride. Then he took his way back along the path by which he had come. He found the old keeper still poking about among his rearing coops.

"Dayson," he said, speaking rather curtly, for him. "I want you to understand one thing, and I mean it to be thoroughly understood. I won't have any dogs shot in any of my coverts, nor anywhere else on my ground. You understand that I thoroughly mean what I say. And tell Pierce the same thing." Pierce was Dayson's subordinate.

"Very good, zur," was the rather surly reply. "Thought I heard one of them a yarpin' araound not long since," he added, suspiciously; "but mebbe' I was mistaken."

"Well, anyhow, I won't have any shot, no matter whose they are, so don't forget it."

Dayson assented, likewise surlily, but he gazed after the retreating form of his master with something between a scowl and a leer, and muttered unto himself soft but scorching imprecations. But he was not so disconcerted as might have been the case, remembering that if there were more ways of killing a cat than drowning her, exactly the same held good of a dog. He would simply double his number of traps. No embargo had been laid on these infernal machines—only upon destruction through the agency of the gun.

Selmin, returning to the house, felt that his mind was dwelling upon the recent meeting to an extent that was all out of proportion to the incident itself; and of this he, from time to time, kept reminding

himself. Had the other party to it been plain or dowdy, of course he would not have given the matter another thought; but she had appealed to his intense love of the beautiful, and though never accounted a susceptible man, this applied to the other sex as well as to the everlasting charm of Nature. Now he could not eliminate that picture from his mind, the single figure with its background of shining water and mirrored trees, and framed in the redundant glories of sun-networked leafage and vista-ed tree-trunks.

Mechanically he went on his way, hardly knowing it as he entered a walled garden where a plentiful showing of peaches and apricots upon the wall which faced due south, promised a right luscious indulgence a month or so later. Butterflies fluttered lazily in the glowing warmth, and the chastened hum of bees made tuneful melody; and all the while his thoughts were busy with one conjecture—who was she? Who could she be, and how was he to set about finding out? From what she had said it was obvious that she was more or less in the habit of coming there, for had not she shown herself conversant with old Dayson's cantankerous reputation? Should he lay himself out to wander in such wise as to stand a good chance of effecting just such another casual meeting? But against this came the consideration that even were he successful he would hardly be justified in following up an acquaintance so slight that it could scarcely be considered an acquaintance at all?

Luncheon was ready as he re-entered the house, and

as he sat at table in the bright, cheerful dining-room, he began to feel very much alone. He had hardly been alone since his accession, and now he missed Durward. What a nuisance that the latter should have elected to run away just now. What a splendid afternoon of it they could have had together, on some ramble far afield, on foot or on bicycles—Selmin as yet had not got into the way of any other form of exercise, it did not leave them sufficiently independent; and to plug along at a jog-trot on horseback and a hard high road, did not commend itself. He had done too much saddle in his time, under all circumstances of hardship and discomfort, to look upon it as an exercise to be undertaken for pleasure.

We cannot say whether the events of the morning conduced to such a vein of thought—probably Selmin would have declared emphatically that they did not—but now, as he sat alone a feeling of dissatisfaction, of which he had felt twinges before, came upon him more forcibly than ever. He had realised, as he thought, the dream of his life, and yet these twinges of dissatisfaction brought home to him that he had not. What did life hold out for him—that was the question that hit him between the eyes harder than ever, now as he sat alone? A round of sport—hunting and shooting in the winter, fishing and wandering about the country in the spring and summer—such had at one time appeared to him the ideal life. But—he was alone.

Now, to-day, he realised the total difference in matters social. In the old life he would simply have

saddled up a horse, or inspanned a buggy and betaken himself off on his own invitation to the dwelling of some friend or neighbour, anywhere within a radius of thirty miles or even more, and have made himself jolly there until his relative's return, and all as a matter of course. Here nothing of the sort to take him out of himself. A stiff, return call perhaps, and some very thinned-out and lukewarm tea, with which he had been wont to poison himself to save the feelings of this or that hostess of half an hour, then a return to solitude. There was no social intercourse here, only the cut-and-dried; only stiffness and formality. For the first time since he had come to Selmingfold—for life—he began to feel thoroughly hipped and depressed.

He got up from table, and adjourned to his "den." This was typical as a department. Its interior was the acme of free-and-easiness, therefore supremely untidy. Pipes and pipe-racks, cigar and cigarette boxes; a writing-table piled high with papers and dust; a glazed book-case containing sporting books and novels galore, and a few savage weapons, collected by him, disposed about the walls. Two or three of Durward's favourite pipes sprawled about the mantelpiece, speaking loudly of the absent one. Selmin lighted his own and took up the daily paper. It was wearisome, seemingly full of nothing but interminable political wrangles, and he hated politics. No, it wouldn't do, and he flung it down in disgust.

In the shortening light of a winter afternoon, with a roaring fire and the curtains snugly drawn, and the

rain volleying against the windows, he might have made himself settled and snug with a book and a pipe. But, under present circumstances, the room was a bright and cheerful one, and the golden air zephyring through the wide open window, and the unclouded sunlight, and the fair panorama without—called. He could not remain within walls. Jumping up from his chair, he went downstairs to find a hat and a stick. He must ramble forth somewhere—anywhere, as long as it was in the open.

CHAPTER V.

THE ENSCOTTS.

UPWARD, on Canonbury Link, he found all the "open" he wanted. The soft south summer breeze, blowing direct from the Channel, was cool up there, and below, over the Weald, was the same mapped panorama of green meadow and rich woodland, and hoary church-tower and snug farmstead. The higher gables of Selmingfold, too, rose distant above the sloping woods. But Canonbury Link was a point objective for trippers, odd groups of whom, carrying now emptied luncheon baskets, were strolling along the top of the Down. He turned his steps downward, and struck into a path which wound through the beech hanger whose great crescent of leafage dominated the indent of meadowland beneath. Here was coolness and silence; silence, save for the voluptuous voices of wood-pigeons, unseen in their green and lofty retreat, or the staccato scurry of a squirrel's claws up the smooth, hard tree-trunks.

It was strange how his mind should keep on dwelling upon the meeting of that morning; but it did. Why had he not, by some, or any sort of device, manœuvred to prolong it? No, that was ridiculous, and an idea not to be encouraged. But whether so or not he was conscious of a certain restlessness which had been upon him ever since. He was bored with being alone. He decided that he would wire to Durward and run up to town for a day or two and join him. Yes, he would send the wire directly, from the nearest post-office.

To this end he began turning his steps homeward. The path was narrow through the beech woods, narrow and slippery. Just then something pattered immediately behind him, and something at the same time cold and warm came into contact with his hand. He looked down with ever so slight a start. The contact was that of a dog's nose, and a dog's tongue.

A long-haired black retriever was pressing against his legs, wagging its tail furiously, and a positively glad light of recognition shining from its brown, beautiful eyes. On his other side, not to be left out in the cold, was a red Irish terrier, squirming and whining.

"Well met, chaps!" said Selmin, pressing a caressing hand on both. "Such dogs! And where do you come from now?" and a good deal more dog talk. But the answer was at hand, and that objectively.

Round a turn of the narrow path, appearing as it

were suddenly, came the same figure which had constituted the central one of the picture which had been obsessing his mind since—only that same morning.

Both looked astonished, and, truth to tell, just faintly embarrassed. But the attitude of the dogs saved the situation. They were positively effusive in their attentions to Selmin, and would be equally positive in refusing any invitation to desist therefrom. It was impossible to pass with a mere bow and a smile of recognition. The path was too narrow, for one thing, and the two dogs established a most effective blockade.

"They are determined to know me again," remarked Selmin, raising his hat. "Jolly chaps! They gave me quite a start coming up so silently behind. But I hope they've been behaving themselves since. Here, at any rate, I don't think they'd be in peril at the hands of any cantankerous keeper. There's no cover for pheasants, or anything else, in beech woods. Besides, these are part of the Downs."

Before the girl could reply there was another arrival on the scene, an elderly gentleman to wit; a handsome, well-set up, military-looking man, with grey hair and a grey moustache. To him she turned.

"Oh, father, this is the gentleman I was telling you about this morning, who saved the lives of those two bad dogs down there in the Selmingfold woods."

At this Selmin fairly started, and well he might,

remembering that the life-saving process consisted simply and solely in having advanced but a few yards into the covert only in time to meet the truants returning. But he remembered that it was always a mistake to be too diffident. Besides, he reflected that if he had not actually saved their lives in the past, he had taken steps to effect a tolerably good insurance on them for the future.

"That was very kind of you, sir," rejoined the new arrival, before he could say anything, and there was a bluff, downright heartiness in his speech and manner which reminded Selmin somewhat of that of his daughter when she had invoked the aid of the first-comer in her distress. Meanwhile, he was not blind to the fact that the speaker was, to use a colloquialism, "sizing him up."

"I am glad if I was of any service," Selmin answered, simply. "These two jolly fellows are awfully friendly," he went on, turning to the dogs again. "They look like pedigree, too."

This was the lifting of the sluice.

"Pedigree! I should think they were pedigree. Look at Croom there—by the way, his real, and Kennel Club, name's Macroom, but it's got down to Croom for short, and purposes of calling. You know, there's a lot in a dog having a good sonorous name for purposes of calling, and that's one. Give him a thin, piping sort of name and he can't hear it. But a good resounding one—there you are!"

In the course of this dissertation all three had

resumed their way, and the dissertation did not stop there, and Selmin, at any rate, was glad that it did not. Who was she? he had been asking himself ever since the morning's meeting. Now there was likely to occur at any moment the answer. So he was at no pains to interrupt the speaker's flow upon what was obviously a congenial subject, in fact, deftly prompted him in the continuation of it whenever signs showed that it might be beginning to flag, and thus the trio took their way to the foot of the Downs for all the world as if they had gone up them together hours before.

"May I ask if you are making a stay in the neighbourhood?" hazarded Selmin, as they reached a point where his road diverged, besides, he did not want to seem to push the acquaintance unduly.

"Yes. We're here for the summer. We're in rooms in a farmhouse just overlooking the Steynhurst road. There, I could have pointed it out to you from up under Canonbury. It stands out quite plainly. Still, you can't mistake it. It stands alone, with several sycamore trees fore and aft. Here—I'll give you my card, and I hope, if you're passing that way any time, you'll look in and have a glass of grog and a bit of a yarn."

"Thanks. I'll be delighted," answered Selmin, as he took the card. And indeed he meant it all. Here he had been reflecting upon the stiffness and unsociability of English conditions of life, and now just the opposite suddenly cropped up, and that right in the heart of those objectionable conditions.

Who was she? he had been asking himself. He read the card—

"Captain J. Tyrwhitt Enscott, R.N.R."

"Bother!" he exclaimed, with a quick move to his pocket. "But I'm afraid I haven't got a card. Well, my name's Selmin——"

The girl looked up quickly, and—interrupted him—as is the manner of women.

"Of Selmingfold?" she said. "Then it was in your coverts my dogs were trespassing. Then, Mr. Selmin, I can only thank you the more for your kindness."

"Oh, no—no. Please don't. There's no question of anything of the kind. And I've given strict orders to my keepers that no dogs are to be shot under any circumstances whatever, so don't be uneasy on that head, Miss Enscott, please."

"You are very kind," she said again, with another glance up at him.

"Why, fancy murdering such beauties as these," he went on, bending down to pat the dogs, partly to conceal that he felt a little off his balance. "It would merit hanging, richly so. Well, Captain Enscott, I'll certainly take you at your word, on the understanding that the arrangement is reciprocal. Won't you back me up, Miss Enscott?"

"Oh, I will," she answered with a smile, and one of those frank, straightforward glances. And then they bade each other good-bye, and the clasp of hands exchanged between those two bronzed-faced men was that of a mutual liking and confidence.

"That's rather a case of 'well met,'" said the girl, as, with a hand linked in her father's arm, the pair took their way along the hedge-shaded road in an opposite direction to that taken by Selmin. "I had no idea who he was this morning, though of course one could see at a glance he was quite all right. Selmin of Selmingfold. But he hasn't always been at Selmingfold—you can see that, too."

"Rather. He never laid on that copper sheathing under an English sun. Any amount of outdoor burning here hasn't got the same tinge in it as that which you collect from over-seas. He'll have had his share of rough and tumble in outlying parts, I'll bet. Nothing like it either, for knocking the nonsense out of a man."

"Well, this one doesn't look as if he wanted any nonsense knocked out of him. I think he's awfully nice."

"Possibly, because he *has* had it all knocked out. Ha, ha!" rejoined the captain, in a jolly, hearty voice. "Well, I hope we'll see more of him. Make things livelier for a certain little girl stuffed away with a prosy old fogey—what?"

"I don't know about that part of it. I'm quite content with the 'prosy old fogey,'" returned the girl, pressing the arm she held. "Still, he seems nice, and a bit of a yarn with a man and a brother wouldn't do you any harm, old father, after being stuck all this time with the said 'little girl.'"

"Ha! Don't want anyone else," answered the

captain, decisively. "Still, if this is a decent chap, we may as well try an experiment in his acquaintance."

"Of course. Why not? And he was awfully nice about the dogs this morning, and they were romping through his own coverts, his own cherished coverts. And he has given orders that they are not to be shot. Do you know—I believe he has done it since—since this morning, I mean. Well, that makes him all the more awfully nice. And that old beast Dayson, I was getting quite scared of him."

"Selmin of Selmingfold!" repeated Captain Enscott, musingly. "That sounds good, and illiterative and comfortable. I've seen the man before two or three times, and wondered who he was. I always freeze on to anyone who has seen other parts of the world, and I could tell at a glance this one had. So I wondered who he was."

"Well, now we know," answered the girl, gaily. "And so does he. I wonder if he'll take us at our word and look in. It's his duty as a resident to call on visitors. So we'll see."

Selmin, taking his way homeward with long strides through a woodland path which constituted a considerable short cut, found his mind dwelling upon those he had just left, quite as much as theirs were dwelling upon him. "Who was she?" he had been asking himself. Now he knew.

He looked at the card again. R.N.R.! At first glance he had taken his new acquaintance for a

military man, with his trim moustache, and well-set up figure; and he was a sailor. A naval man, retired or not, would have worn a short, close-clipped beard, or would have been clean-shaven. R.N.R., too? This was clearly a retired captain of one of the bigger mail lines. But he had taken a liking to him on sight, whoever he might be. He foresaw a revolution in the depression and boredom of his solitude. There was a genuineness and a hearty ring in the captain's invitation that appealed to the old free and easy colonial habits, as against the stiff and starched boredom of English and county ways. He would certainly take an early opportunity of following up this acquaintance.

But strange to say the inclination to hurry up Durward's return, or to wire that he would come up and join him, seemed to have fallen into the background. Even when he was presently seated at his solitary dinner, looking out upon the changing lights reflected from a glorious sunset upon the near Downs he did not feel the want of companionship.

"Wade," he said. "Do you know anything of a Captain Enscott, who is staying near here?"

"Captain Enscott?" repeated the butler. "Yes, sir, I have heard of him. He's staying the summer at Chirol's Farm—that house on the Steynhurst road, this side of Gravelhurst. It stands back in some old sycamore-trees."

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir. He's a retired sea captain, I'm told. He commanded on one of the big liners. I'm not

sure which, sir—Atlantic or Australian, I believe—but I can find out. I think, sir—at least, so I've heard—that he wants to take a house somewhere in these parts."

"Does he?" said Selmin. And then he relapsed into silence as if the subject had no further interest for him.

But—it had.

CHAPTER VI.

DRIFTING CHANCE.

CAPTAIN ENSCOTT, even as Wade had said, and Selmin had surmised, was a retired commander on one of the big mail lines, on which line too, his only son was now serving as surgeon. Incidentally he had just realised the dream of his life—of his life for the past few years, that is—the time when he should be able to retire, and live quietly in the heart of the fair English country which he loved so well, in the companionship of his only daughter; and having realised it, he was perfectly and entirely happy.

But this state of things is never destined to last, and the first little rift in it occurred to the captain while smoking his after-breakfast pipe two or three mornings after the meeting with Selmin. In fact, Selmin *was* the rift.

For those two had, to use a colloquialism which best expresses the case, "taken to each other," and that beyond the ordinary. He was observant enough to see that at very nearly the first glance. And most likely it would lead to his being left alone again

just when he was beginning thoroughly to enjoy the evening of his life. No, he did not enjoy this aspect of things at all.

And yet—and yet? A girl like this one of his was bound to fulfil her mission in life—which was the reverse of withering at home developing into an old maid. Still, there was no hurry, and he had no wish for other developments to happen along just yet. So he felt misgivings on the point, and began to regret having given his fine, free, hearty friendliness of character the rein, to the extent of his hospitable and unconventional invite to Selmin. Well, perhaps the latter would not take him at his word, and, after all, they were both snug and jolly as they were. But, as against this consoling thought, came the recollection that the girl had manifested a desire to "talk Selmin" ever since that meeting.

She was away just now. She had gone in to Steynhurst on her bicycle directly after breakfast, to order some things from the shops, and had taken the two dogs. At the end of his second pipe the captain began to feel lonely. It was an ideal summer day, and the grateful green line of the Downs cut hazily into the unclouded blue of the sky, the crowned summit of Canonbury half visible on the right, where the nearer rise of wooded hill cut it off. And the feeling of loneliness deepened his former misgivings. Apart from Selmin anyhow, would it be very long before he was left alone? No, of course not. Whereby it was evident he was getting on a little bit too fast.

He skimmed through the morning paper, then got

sick of it and began to feel drowsy. The hideous seasick yell of a new-fangled motor-horn started him wide awake with a muttered curse as a long, low, grey machine shot on by the tarred road below, at the rate of any speed you like, to the peril of life and limb of His Majesty's lieges. The Steynhurst road was guilty of sharp curves highly dangerous to cyclists, and remembering this, the captain, we grieve to say, muttered a very heartfelt curse. What if the girl were to meet one of these infernal machines, driven at that pace, at such a point? He looked at his watch again. Time she were back, he thought, shutting it with a snap.

Ah, what was that? Two dogs, one large, the other small, came careering round the bend of the road beneath. His face cleared. Immediately afterwards, not one cyclist but two—and one a male. They came gallantly up the hill, not dismounting to walk their machines. All his train of thought came back to the watcher, with the same tinge of regret over his perhaps too spontaneous invite.

"Hallo, old father. I haven't been long, have I? Mr. Selmin and I came together in the postcard shop, and he was kind enough to ride this far with me on his way."

"On his way," echoed, though to himself, the mariner grimly—the fact being that the words literally represented about two sides of a square out of his way. However, he answered quite cordially—

"Glad to see you, Mr. Selmin. Come in, come in." But, as he looked at his daughter, her face one glorious sparkle with the splendid outdoor exercise,

his former train of thought clouded upon him thicker than ever.

"Thanks, Captain Enscott. I could do with five minutes' rest. It's turned jolly hot, but it's seasonable."

"Oh, yes, seasonable, quite. But it's cooler inside than out, in this weather."

He led the way into a large cool room, an old-world looking room, whose bending beams seemed taxed to their uttermost to hold up an equally bending ceiling. Two or three big, comfortable arm-chairs stood invitingly at hand, and to one of those he motioned his guest. Then he opened a cheffonier, and in a trice there was something long and sparkling on the table.

"Why, that's capital," said Selmin, "as coming on top of a not very long, but very hot ride—and a scare. There was a beastly express engine going at about a million miles an hour, nearly murdered us, and still more nearly the dogs, at the bend just where you first get that splendid view of Canonbury and Wesson House."

The captain exploded.

"Was it a long, low grey one?" he said.

"That's it. We couldn't see the brute's number as we were meeting it, and it was gone in a flash. Otherwise I'd have enjoyed running the infernal road-hog in."

The captain again exploded, strongly, and bordering on the unparliamentary.

"Oh, well. It's all in the day's work," pronounced his daughter gaily, unpinning her hat and

flinging it down on the table ; an unstudied act which was not lost upon the younger man, in that it meant she did not go upstairs and look in the glass after her quick, hot ride. "And I wish we'd got a machine that would go like that."

"Oh, do you ?" retorted her father, with something like a grunt.

"I should just think so. It'd be lovely to go through the air at that rate," was the unabashed reply.

"I've thought of setting one up myself," said Selmin. "Not for scorching purposes, though—oh, no! I've been too much used to old-fashioned, four-legged locomotion all my life. But these things save a lot of time, if you have to catch a train for instance."

"You've been a lot away in the Colonies, I'm told, Mr. Selmin ?" said the captain.

"Yes. But you've no idea how this splendid English country fetches me as a contrast. It has its other side, too—a certain element of stiffness—but I daresay I may be over-rating that."

"Not at all. I quite agree with you." And then the old man rattled off into a lot of questions on a very congenial subject—other parts of the world, to wit, and it transpired that Selmin had voyaged by his old line, and knew several of his old shipmates. Here was a find—and the talk waxed, but never waned. Old Enscott was quite wound up, and reeled out reminiscences almost by the hour. In the midst of which the clock struck one.

"Here, you'll stop and have some lunch with us,

of course, Mr. Selmin," he said, realising this as the servant girl came in to lay the cloth. "I don't know what we've got. Have we got anything, Lauretta?"

"We've got something," replied his daughter, with a bright, and, to the onlooker, very fascinating laugh. "I daresay, as Mr. Selmin has been such a traveller, he may have done worse."

Selmin protested that he should rather think he had, and accepted this impromptu invite cordially. But at last he had got her name, and on this head he had speculated mightily, fitting to her every name he thought would suit. Lauretta! What a pretty name, and how well it did suit. He had been fearing it might have proved to be something ugly, and not at all appropriate.

After lunch there was more consumption of tobacco, and more reminiscences on the part of the captain. Lauretta was delighted. She had been beset at times with a fear that her father would become bored, shut up alone with her. He had always been accustomed to a life surrounded by more or less vivacious people, for the commander of a crack liner would pick his own immediate society from the ever-varying population afloat from year end to year end, to the almost, if not quite, exclusion of bores; and apart from his cessation of work, and the responsibilities and at times excitement of his calling, he must miss the glitter and sparkle of the dining saloon, with the constant and ever-varying fund of conversation as the noble steamer thrashed her way through the black waters in the Atlantic night. And

now, in his country seclusion, he had found, all unexpectedly, a congenial listener and talker : a good talker, too ; although it must be admitted that Selmin took the lion's share of the listening. Yes, she was delighted on her father's account ; but—what of her own ? Well, of that hereafter.

It was astonishing how the hours of that afternoon fled. An attempted move on the part of the guest was promptly and unanimously negatived. Then, after tea, Lauretta suggested a quiet stroll just to give the dogs a run, and they wandered through the cool leafy lanes, and along field paths where the dappled kine munched, or into covert sides where they had no earthly business since they were not within the confines of Selmin's realm, but the dogs were kept well in hand for the occasion. But here Lauretta took a hand in the talking, as she discanted with knowledge upon the sights and sounds of the sweet country, both animate and inanimate. Selmin took in the easy natural swing of the tall graceful figure, walking beside him, the sparkle of healthy glow in what he was now beginning to define to himself as a beautiful face, a very beautiful face, indeed ; and gave himself over to a thorough enjoyment of the hour and situation. Decidedly he had fallen upon a stroke of luck, he thought. He had found the very unconventionality which he had so missed, and it enhanced by such a rare element of attraction.

" It's been very jolly of you to take us in this free and friendly way, Mr. Selmin," said the captain, as, having returned to the house, Selmin had got out his bicycle, and was saying good-bye. " It's the first

time, but I hope it won't be the last, not by a long way."

"That it won't, Captain Enscott, you may be very sure," was the hearty answer. "But it's your turn to come and take me in the same way. Don't you agree, Miss Enscott?"

"Yes, and we'll do it," she replied, with a bright, frank smile, as they clasped hands. "Good-bye." Then he mounted his bicycle and rode off.

"What a fool I was," he said to himself, when he reached the bottom of the hill, no further from the house than the point where the two of them had first appeared within sight of it that morning. "What an infernal fool! Why didn't I make them fix up a day definitely, instead of leaving it an open concern. That sort of arrangement's always unsatisfactory."

He hesitated as though to go back, then thought better of it. After all, he could always fix it up later, and it was a mistake to hurry matters of that sort. But the warm, sparkling beauty of the girl, that last pressure of her hand, seemed to remain with him, and he was forced to own to himself that he did want to see the one again, and to return the other, and that at the earliest possible opportunity.

When he reached home and sat down to his solitary dinner he did not feel lonely. And yet with it came a letter from Durward, setting forth that that worthy would be detained in town for a few days longer, and was sorry he could not return just yet. He would do so, however, at the earliest possible moment—and so on.

The receipt of this missive twenty-four hours earlier, or even twelve, would have kindled in Selmin a feeling of disappointment, possibly of part resentment, certainly of depression. Now it had no such effects. He could do without Durward for a few days; in short, the unpleasant naked truth would obtrude itself upon him; he did not want Durward—just then.

He no longer felt lonely, for he had the company of a face, a voice; more, of a presence, and alone he could dwell upon that. It did not even occur to him to dub himself a fool; if it had, it would merely be with the result of dismissing the idea, and—hugging his "folly" all the closer.

CHAPTER VII.

WATER AND LEAF.

"He did not want Durward—just then."

No, he certainly did not, nor anyone else, either. Such was Selmin's unspoken thought, three mornings later as he sat at breakfast opening his post. And one item of the same was another letter from Durward further postponing his return. It was seldom that things fitted in so well. The rest of the post might go to blazes just then.

It was another of those well-nigh divine days which our English summer can sometimes show, and when it does, why, no summer on earth can beat it. And he meant to make the very most of it, and the method in which he proposed to do so was in this wise.

In the course of conversation with Captain Enscott, nautical and otherwise aquatic, on the occasion of the visit we have just set forth, that retired mariner had let fall enquiries as to the prospect of fishing in the neighbourhood, and Selmin had enlightened him. There was nothing to be done with the fly, but there were at least a couple of rivers within easy

reach for coarse fishing—in which a good deal of scientific angling of that kind was done in season—and these yielded large takes, at times, of giant roach, and fairly large pike. Inclusive there was Laylock Pond, his own property, and at all times of the year there were very respectable perch to be had from that. If the captain were inclined to try his hand, he would of course be heartily welcome to at any time.

But it had occurred to Selmin that here would be an excellent opportunity of making up for his oversight on that occasion in not fixing up something definite; so on the day before this he had despatched an early note to Chirol's Farm, asking Captain Enscott if they had nothing better to do—"they," be it observed—and would meet him at the boathouse in the woods, it would be a good way of getting through a day, with a little impromptu lunch just to vary the proceedings; in short, to make an informal picnic of it. To this he had just opened a cordial reply, in the affirmative. So the remainder of his post might go hang, and—he did not want Durward—just then.

Selmin took his way down in the bright summer sunlight of the cloudless morning, down through the meadow where old Dayson had been busy among his rearing coops. The latter was busy among them still. To him Selmin gave a word of cheery greeting, which was met by a half-surly reply.

"Be I to knock daown them thur notice boards, zur?" he said. "Like as you was saying t'other day?"

"Oh, no. It isn't worth the trouble, Dayson. Leave 'em alone. At any rate, most of them nobody

could read, they're so ancient; but don't bother about worrying people on the strength of 'em."

And Pierce, the under-keeper, who was in attendance with rods, and tackle, and bait, grinned surreptitiously. He had divined who was to have the free run of the whole demesne. Likewise he was not fond of his official superior.

Selmin held on his way through the cavern-like path which intersected the dense covert, then out upon the more open wood; and there, not very far from the spot where he had first seen her, framed as before in a setting of oaks and tall tossing bracken, and a background of red smooth stems of Scotch fir, the girl was standing.

He looked, and looked again. She was alone.

"Good morning, Miss Enscott. Where—why—— Hasn't your father come?"

"No. Not yet. He said he might join us later," she answered. "Oh, isn't this a heavenly day, and a heavenly spot," looking round.

"Yes, I agree. See how the sunshine networks through, and there's even a belated thrush piping up. We shan't get much more of them, I'm afraid, and the cuckoos are all done. Well, I wonder if we'll get some fish. If we get any before lunch, why, we'll knock up a fire and have them for lunch. Fish done straight from the water are the best fish of all. I've found that out in the course of my wanderings. I say, though, but I hope the boat isn't leaky. It's a precious old one."

Even the boathouse was picturesquely in keeping. It was built of split larch-stems with the bark on,

and had a high-pitched roof thatched with ling. After a little baling the boat was pronounced sufficiently dry.

"I'm taking him along to do the baiting," explained Selmin, while Pierce was engaged in the baling operation. "It isn't like the fly business. For perch you must have a lot of worms—very messy worms—and I don't like that part of it. I see you've got a rod, but I've brought along enough for all of us." Then to the under-keeper, "Put the hamper on board, Pierce. We'll have lunch at the upper end—under the chestnuts when we're ready for it."

They shoved off, pushing through the broad leaves of water lilies and disturbing a family of coots, mostly consisting of little fluffy balls which pushed and splashed over and through the surface in a frantic state of scare. Selmin was watching his companion. She was looking her very best, the glowing dark beauty born of the very acme of health; the straight profile against the sheen of the water, as she turned this way and that to take in the surroundings. He thought how appropriately framed by the said surroundings was such a picture.

More minor waterfowl scurried away, as having paddled up to the head of the great pond, the anchor was let go. Long sweeping boughs of oak and hazel hung out over the surface, in places brushing it, and its burnished mirror was here and there broken by skimming swallows.

"There's a fine old tree-trunk sunk here," said Selmin, "and the big perch seem to lie around it.

Then there's a runnel coming in which helps to feed the pond. It comes from another—quite a small one—just above; there, beyond that grating."

The hooks were baited and the lines dropped over. At first Lauretta sat watching her float expectant and eager, and Selmin sat watching *her*. A new sense of the joy of possession came over him during that process. This tiny fragment of God's earth, which was his very own, he was in fact beginning to share with *her*.

But as the float sat placidly, with no sign of so much as the smallest ripple disturbing its fat green and white equilibrium, her expectancy gradually lulled.

"They don't seem to be biting," she said.

"Patience! That's the first essential with ground fishing," returned Selmin. "Now, when you're throwing a fly it's different, because you're always on the move yourself. But, with this kind, why—patience."

"Can we talk?"

"Oh, yes—quietly."

"What a jolly big pond this is, and what a splendid sheet for skating."

"Yes, it's that, but it's a beastly dangerous one. In fact you want an extra hard snap of frost to go upon it at all. Even then it's risky."

"Why? Is it so very deep?"

"Yes. But that not the danger. It's full of springs, and they don't freeze—at least not hard enough. Several people have been drowned here

by going through the ice—one of the cases was while I was here as a schoolboy."

The girl gave a little shudder.

"Really? And to look at it to-day, so still and warm and lovely. It's difficult to realise."

"In a way. But it's only an instance of life's grimness of contrast."

"Well, I don't think I'd care to skate on it. And I'm so fond of skating."

It was hard, amid the golden greenery of the sweeping foliage, among the sensuous glory of the summer air, to carry the mind so far forward; yet Selmin did. A picture rose up before his mind of the bite of winter and the sparkle of frost upon ground and bare trees, and the tuneful ring of skates; and the speaker, gliding over the glassy surface hand in hand with himself, her eyes glowing with the sheer exhilaration of healthfulness.

"Aren't we getting just a little 'previous'?" he said. "We'll get winter fast enough; don't let's discount this splendid summer. But if we do get a cold enough snap, I shall hope to see you cutting figure eights on this surface yet. Hallo! Look! you've got one on."

Quickly she turned. The fat green and white float was sounding down into the depths in the most encouraging fashion—to the live organisation on this side of it, that is. Instinctively she jerked the rod, and thought she had hooked a moving cannon ball.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "It must be a whopper!"

"Oh, let him frolic around," answered Selmin. "Perch don't want any playing. Only haul in your line a little, through the rings, or he may get entangled in anything at the bottom. There—that's it."

She followed out his instructions, her cheeks and eyes aglow with excitement. To this he paid rather more attention than to the landing of the prize, and lo! in a minute the striped side and orange fins of a heavy perch gleamed broad-side up half a foot below the surface. The under-keeper reached out a landing net, and with a toss and a flop the fish was squirming in the bottom of the boat.

"Oh, what a beauty!" cried Lauretta. "It's the biggest fish I've ever caught."

"Pound and a quarter, eh, Pierce?" said Selmin, as the man gave it the quietus by the simple process of a tap on the head.

"Quite that, sir. He be middlin', sure-lye."

Lauretta reached out a hand to pick up the prize, for the moment transformed into the primitive woman. The prize of her bow and spear! Here was a throw back of æons! But she withdrew her hand with a little cry. The fish, with that wonderful tenacity of life common to its kind, revived by the touch, had given a convulsive squirm, with the result that the large spiny dorsal fin had effected about the same puncture as would have done sharp contact with, say, a healthy mimosa thorn. She held up a damaged hand. The puncture—a deep one—just below the ball of the thumb, was bleeding copiously.

"I got it that time!" she said, with a wry attempt at mirth, for the wound was hurting abominably.

Selmin uttered a click of consternation, as he quickly possessed himself of the injured hand.

"You have to be careful how you unhook a large perch," he said, staunching the flow with his handkerchief. "Here, Pierce, open that hamper, quick! Good thing we shipped it." For the warm colour had fled from the girl's face. The spike of the fish had penetrated rather deep into the muscles, and the result was painful enough to produce a momentary faintness. "What have you got there?" he went on quickly. "Draw one of those champagne bottles. Hurry up!"

"Oh, I'm an awful coward," laughed the girl. "There. It feels better now, but it did seem to hurt. Thanks."

He had brimmed up a glass with the foaming invigorant.

"Down with it," he said, handing it to her, indeed half holding it to her lips. "No heel taps. Every drop."

"I can't." She paused, gasping for breath, then laughing. But the colour had returned to her cheeks.

"Thanks awfully. I do feel better now."

She did. The first acuteness of the pain had subsided, and the stimulant did the rest. He had again possessed himself of the hand, and was bathing it with his handkerchief which he had dipped in the water.

"It'll soon lose the throbbing now," he said, seeming in no hurry to relinquish his job in amateur surgery.

"Oh, yes, of course it will," she answered, with a laugh, the colour returning more and more to her face. "But really, it did hurt, and——Oh, Mr. Selmin, how kind you are!"

"Kind! How?"

"Why most men would have thought me an awful coward, voted me a first-class nuisance, too, making such a fuss over a mere pinprick."

"Then they'd have been first-class fools, that's all. A 'pin-prick' of that sort can hurt—and that most infernally, especially where you got it, as I know by experience. I once got scored by the hind hoof of a small buck I'd shot and handled carelessly when it wasn't quite dead. It took me in exactly the same place, too—look, here's the scar still. Well, it made me feel uncommonly sick for the moment, I can tell you. Here, put down the rest of your medicine, then you'll feel better still."

She obeyed, and with the result predicted. The while she had been noticing the change in him. His normal manner had been smooth, easy, even, matter-of-course. But in the face of this small emergency he had shown himself in a new light. He had, all of a sudden, taken charge of her, and that in a very decisive, peremptory way. She liked that. Moreover, beneath the same decisive and peremptory way there had run a very subtle and consolatory vein. She liked that—perhaps even more. Possibly for this reason her tone took on a softer note towards him, all unconsciously to herself. He, for his part, certainly was conscious of it.

but put it down to the cause that she had been rather shaken.

And the sunlight poured through the green luxuriance mirrored upon the placid surface of the great pond, and these two were here together in the golden sensuous glory of the summer midday, and their voices were already taking on an unconscious softness, each toward the other. What then?

"Boat, ahoy!"

The hail came from further down the water. Both started, as though suddenly brought down, if not exactly to earth, again, at any rate from a certain tension of atmosphere. And again the hail rang forth—hearty, mellow, and somewhat louder:

"Boat ahoy!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"EXCALIBUR POOL."

"THAT'S father," said the girl. "He's evidently down at the boathouse."

"Yes. I say, though, how the morning has slid," returned Selmin, looking at his watch. "One o'clock already. Up anchor, Pierce, and back to pick up the captain."

Lauretta answered the hail, in a peculiar clear, shrill call.

"That's our signal," she explained. "It carries quite as far as any whistle."

It did not take long to paddle back, between the widening banks of glowing greenery. Selmin's other guest was standing by the boathouse, a stick in one hand, and an empty pipe in the other.

"Any sport?" he cried, as they jumped ashore.

"Only one, but he's a beauty," answered the girl, enthusiastically. "No, I won't touch him. I've got to learn how. They're horribly spiky."

"Only one so far, but we'll get more later," said Selmin. "Jump aboard, captain. We'll have lunch higher up, at the head of the pond. There's a jolly mossy bit, under some horse-chestnut trees, cut out for that very process. We needn't hurry ourselves. Later in the afternoon the perch will be biting much more freely."

We have dwelt on the fact that the situation might be working up from a summer idyll to its sequel, yet one of the parties thereto, Selmin to wit, did not in the least feel that the arrival upon the scene of a third had in any way damped it. He was past the age of enthusiasms, and being, as before pointed out, something of a dreamer, had a certain vein of philosophy in him. His present stage with regard to this girl was a watching one. Wherefore he welcomed the new arrival, in the shape of her father, with a whole-hearted welcome.

"This is uncommonly jolly," pronounced the captain, as, with his back against a smooth-boled beech, and after a very appetising cold lunch, with plenty to moisten the same, he lit a cigar and looked around. "D'you know, Mr. Selmin, it's the kind of thing I've often thought of in my sea days, and wondered if I should ever find."

"Yes. We do that," was the answer. "And when we find it—why, we find there's something wanting."

"So we do—so we may," said the other, his thoughts going back to his meditations as to the

potentiality of his being sooner or later left in solitude again.

"Oh, I say, father, Mr. Selmin, isn't this rather dismal sort of talk for a day like this?" struck in Lauretta. "Hang these philosophical speculations! We haven't come out for that."

"Of course we haven't," said Selmin. "Here, captain, let me fill up for you again," seizing one of the gold-topped bottles. "Here's success to us this afternoon."

"Why, thanks, that's capital. Ditto. The child'll start pricking her fingers over again—ha, ha!"

"No, I shan't," retorted Lauretta. "But I want to catch some more big ones."

The moss carpeting under the horse-chestnuts was smooth, and just at the right slope for comfortable *al fresco* reclining. Selmin had taken very good care that the hamper was well stocked. The cigars were excellent, and there was no wind to blow them one sided and black. Captain Enscott was enjoying himself immensely.

So, too, in his way, was Selmin. While his male guest was indulging in reminiscence, mostly relating to his nautical career, though not to the technical side of it but to the idiosyncracies of the vast number of people who had passed through his hands in the capacity of passengers, he was contentedly watching the girl. She, reclining there, putting in a remark now and again, was lazily pulling up shreds of moss with long, shapely

fingers. Pierce, the under keeper, was enjoying his lunch and a copious supply of ale, seated at a respectful distance off.

"Any good fish in that pond just above this, Mr. Selmin?" said the captain. "I came past it on my way here, and though small, it looks deep enough. The one bordered with bulrushes, I mean."

"I don't know. I've never tried it," was the answer. "The fact is the place stands in evil repute. Two people were drowned in it, and one was never recovered, although the hole was pumped dry—though when I say dry, it was never that, for the bottom is formed by a slough of liquid mud—almost like a well, in fact. You wouldn't get anyone round here to go near it at dusk, I can tell you."

"How interesting," struck in Lauretta. "A real haunted pool. We must certainly go and look at it. But—do they see anything, Mr. Selmin?"

"You can *see* anything if you make up your mind to see it."

"Ah, you're a sceptic. Now I'm a firm believer in ghosts," answered the girl, almost gravely. "Look here. Would you visit that place in the dark yourself?"

"Certainly, if it was worth while," returned Selmin. "But I shouldn't go out of my way to stroll down there at night on the chance of seeing something I know perfectly well I never could see."

"Ah, but you said just now you could see

anything if you made up your mind to see it."

"Exactly. But your objection answers itself, Miss Enscott. I never could make up my mind to see anything of the kind."

"But what form does the ghost take?" went on the girl, eagerly. "Is it a male one or a female one, or what?"

"I think it's mostly 'what,'" laughed Selmin. "I believe it isn't supposed to take definite shape. There are all sorts of yarns on the subject, and I believe one is that a gigantic hand shoots up out of the water and shakes itself at you. That means death within the year."

"How awfully creepy," answered Lauretta, with a little shudder. Then in a different tone. "You're not making this all up, are you, Mr. Selmin? I believe I'd never forgive you if you were."

"I'm not. Ask Pierce there, if you doubt me. Nothing on earth would induce him to go near it at night in the course of his rounds. He'd far sooner throw up his job. I'd even go further, and make a sporting bet that if I suggested to him to go there now for any purpose—now in the full glare of cloudless sunshine—he'd do all he knew to invent an excuse."

"Really. Well, now, of course I'm dying to see this place. Do show it me before we start fishing again."

"Certainly. It's only a minute or two away, and we've the afternoon before us. Coming, captain?"

But old Enscott knew when he was comfortable, and just now he was becoming a little drowsy.

"Er—well, I passed it this morning, Selmin. In fact it's rather snug here under these trees."

"All right. We shan't be long."

Some fifty yards above the head of the big pond, the wood opened out upon a perfectly clear space, though this was walled in by covert. But in the midst lay a circular pool, perhaps thirty yards in diameter. It was overhung by two moderate-sized oaks, and the surface was picked out by a ring of thickly growing, green bulrush. Lauretta's eyes widened with eager interest.

"So this is the Excalibur Pool," she said. "Why, it's just how I've always pictured the real one, and the giant hand coming up to take the magic sword."

"Excalibur Pool? That's a good name," commented Selmin. "We'll christen it that on the spot:

> "'So flashed and fell the brand, Excalibur;
> But ere he dipt the surface raised an arm
> Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
> And caught him by the hilt and brandished him
> Three times, and drew him under in the mere,'"

he quoted. "Well, perhaps the spectral hand wants something to claw hold of, and if it got it, it might not come up any more. Only the difficulty is to know what the deuce it does want."

"Now you're getting flippant, Mr. Selmin, and

after making that quotation so nicely! But do you know, it's awfully interesting to me, all this."

"Yes? What would you do now if that hand really were to shoot up from the surface?"

"Oh, don't! You'll make me scared directly, even in the glare of this cloudless sunshine, as you put it just now. But at night! I wouldn't come here for anything."

"Yes, it might look rather dismal at night, and then imagination would complete the trick. You'd better not try it."

As they stood there, the images of both were mirrored side by side above the margin of rushes in the smooth, unruffled surface. The dark, beautiful face of the one took on quite a serious, even wistful, look.

"And do you believe," she said, "that this apparition really appears and presages death to whoever sees it?"

"Of course I don't, as I said before. But the country people do most firmly. They claim to give authenticated instances, too. But I ask you, how can any sane man swallow such rubbish?"

Some idea seemed suddenly to strike the girl. Turning she looked her companion squarely in the face.

"And yet—and yet——" she said. "You have been in strange parts of the world—and among savages—and all sorts of queer people. Now, in the course of your wanderings and experiences, did you

never meet with any weird occurrence which was beyond all human explaining? I have heard of such; has nothing of the kind ever come in your way? Ah! I see it has," she added quickly, almost triumphantly. For his face had undergone a momentary change.

"Well, the fact of the matter is," he answered, quickly recovering his normal serenity, "if a man knocks about among queer people and queer localities he's bound to come across some queer things. But that doesn't help him to swallow any sort of yarn evolved by generations of country bogeydom on his return home."

He spoke lightly now, and laughingly. But the time was coming when he, when both of them should remember their conversation of this day.

"We'd better get back," he went on, "or your father will be getting impatient to begin fishing."

"Not he. He'll be only too glad of an excuse for enjoying forty winks. But this has been such an interesting experience to me."

"Well, if you'll take my advice you'll get the subject out of your head as quick as ever you can. Don't dwell upon it, mind. Don't dwell upon it. Throw it off."

She smiled, darkly. "Throw it off." Why, she was making up her mind to pump every rustic on the subject whom she could induce to talk. And, with the idea, it occurred to her that the other was not treating the matter so lightly as he would have

had her believe, else why should he have been so emphatic in his advice?

Even as his daughter had predicted, Captain Enscott was improving the occasion for a siesta, and with his handkerchief over his face, and his half-smoked cigar beside him, was lightly and placidly snoring. Pierce, puffing black clouds from his well-seasoned clay, was conning a weekly—and Radical—newspaper.

"Seems a pity to disturb so much peacefulness," whispered Selmin. "Shall we prolong our stroll through the wood? There's plenty of time."

She agreed. But just then the old man started, wide awake; sailor-like, wide awake on the spot. He began with profuse apologies. We dare not swear that Selmin was not disappointed as he set to work to allay these.

"It's all right, captain. We've plenty of time," he said. "Have a touch of this brown brandy before we get on board," raking out a very comfortable looking bottle.

"Why, thanks, that's not a bad idea, Excellent, excellent!" holding up the glass. "Here's luck to our catch."

The toast certainly proved an auspicious one, for they had hardly settled down to business a quarter of an hour before Lauretta had struck and pulled up another perch even larger than the first.

"I shan't touch this one. No—no!" she laughed, as Pierce deftly unhooked the fish. "Once bit——"

"Talking of once bit," said her father. "I

remember when I was skipper of the *Fijian* we were rolling on the swell in Mossel Bay at anchor, and the passengers wanted to fish for sharks. I didn't like it—it messes the decks so, but I let 'em do it so long as they stuck to the fok'sle. It was Good Friday, and the niggers wouldn't work at the cargo—fat lot the swine care about Good, or Bad, or any other Friday for that matter; but the nigger who won't seize any excuse to knock off work has still got to be born. Well, the passengers got the bo'sun to rig 'em up with lines and the butcher with bait, and set to work. In about half an hour they'd hauled up ten or a dozen small sharks, mostly hammer heads, when one of the ship's boys grabs a fish by the tail and starts lugging him along the deck. He dropped it mighty quick, for the shark squirmed round and snapped his big toe nearly off—he was barefooted of course. That's worse than a dig in the fist from a perch's fin. Eh?"

"Rather. Look out, captain, your float's right under," warned Selmin.

The other promptly hauled up a three-quarter pounder. The sport, such as it was, went on with some briskness, and what with it and interchanged anecdote and experience between the two men, the afternoon seemed to fly—we can answer for it with certainty as to one of them all too quickly.

"We have had a day, and no mistake," pronounced Captain Enscott, as, after a picnic tea under the big chestnuts, they took leave of each other. "Capital sport, too. Fifteen among us, and all good fish."

They were, too, as they lay spread out upon the grass in all their bravery of orange and black, and shining green. The smallest was not much under the pound.

"Well, I hope it won't be the last, by any means," Selmin replied. "It certainly has been jolly."

"The ghost pool has been not the least jolly part of it," smiled Lauretta.

"A contradiction in terms. Good-bye."

And thus, still jesting, they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

MIMOSA ROAD, HAMPSTEAD.

DURWARD was getting very tired of London. More and more the cool leafiness of Selmingfold and the eye-soothing roll of the Downs came back in tantalising contrast to the dust and stuffiness of the summer metropolis—even though the said summer had been, so far, a fine one. But, whereas, bar the worst of the tropics, London in real hot weather is about the most intolerable place under the sun, so now Durward was beginning seriously to plan as to how he should hurry his business through, and once more get upon the train for East Welstead.

It was at such times as this that the question of the possession of Selmingfold would hit him between the eyes, and set him brooding; and it was a point upon which it was not good for him to brood. For now the latest turn his brooding took seemed to bring back that unfenced chalk pit, together with the tiny poisoned arrows.

The club smoking-room was comfortable enough

and fairly cool, but it was nearly deserted. All who could leave the labyrinth of baking streets had done so, and now he had the place almost to himself. He had given up his former rooms by reason of his temporary lodgment at Selmingfold, and if he had not, he could not have stood them alone and in his present vein. Why had not Selmin dropped him a line or two saying how things were going on? It would have interested him doubly in this stage of infernal boredom; and Selmin was not a bad letter-writer, as far as the art of construction went, albeit sporadic in the matter of correspondence. But he little dreamed that Selmin did not want him back just then; in fact, that was a contingency that would have hit him still more between the eyes as an absolutely wild surprise.

It was a Saturday. An intense longing had come upon him to run down to Selmingfold until the following Monday, at any rate. But another man was engaged to dine with him on the Sunday evening mainly with a business object—one relating to the acquisition of his new practice, in fact; therefore it wouldn't do, and for that reason never did the green loveliness of the leafy South Country seem more alluring. No, it wouldn't do, he decided. At this stage of his reflections a letter was handed to him.

The flash of thought that it might be from the other man "crying off"—in which case he would be at Selmingfold within three hours—was dispelled by the sight of the writing, staring at which last he frowned in puzzled perplexity. For it seemed

familiar. Tearing it open he instantaneously mastered two facts, one that it began with "Dear Jack," the other, that it ended with "Mabel Filgay." Three facts, perhaps—the third being that there was a great deal of closely written matter in between these two brace of words. And the address was an ambiguously decipherable number in Mimosa Road, Hampstead.

He stared at the missive and frowned deeply. He disliked long, closely written epistles, especially feminine ones. They required such an effort at deciphering, especially on a hot day—and this was a hot day. He had not heard from the writer for years and years—hardly *of* her. He had carried on a fairly warm flirtation with her those years—and years—ago, when he was a medical student, and she an attractive girl above the ordinary, but somewhat older than himself; incidentally she was a not very near relation. She had gone out to India and married there, and he believed he had heard she had become a widow. And now she was back in England again, presumably for good, to spend the rest of her life wishing she had stayed out there, as most retired Anglo-Indians invariably do, according to his experience. At this point he screwed up sufficient effort to begin upon what she wrote.

She wrote a great deal; about past, present and to come. But from among it he gathered two substantial facts, one that she had a just grown-up daughter—incidentally a dear, sweet child, but, between themselves, with a will of her own—and that

she did so hope he would come out and lunch with them to-morrow.

Durward ended the letter with a feeling of relief. The long and feminine rigmarole, at times irritating to decipher, bored him beyond words. Then he went upstairs for a large reading-glass and by its aid succeeded in locating the ambiguous number of the address.

He decided to take on the invite. It might be amusing to see how Mabel Filgay had turned out, and he was feeling intensely hipped, and, indeed, had been wondering how he was to get through the next day. He supposed she had grown broad-faced and portly, and ill-defined about the waist; looking back she had shown promise of doing that. Probably, too, she had grown commonplace and boring; with ailments, with which, by virtue of his vocation, he would be bound to be regaled. And the "dear, sweet child—with a will of her own?" Well, it might make a faintly—very faintly—interesting study. So he indited a telegraphic reply of acceptance and despatched it.

Now Mimosa Road, Hampstead, as everybody knows, or if not, they know its innumerable counterparts, is a very respectable double row of semi-detached, fairly roomy and with sufficient greenery fore and aft to relieve the eye in late spring, but woefully drooping under layers of dust later in the season; and in winter absolutely dripping and depressing. Here, in the drawing-room of one of the said semi-detacheds that hot Sunday morning,

sat Durward's expectant hostess, and her slightly less expectant daughter—the "dear, sweet, child" alluded to.

"Never mind the clock, mother," the latter was saying. "Your old flame'll be here in a minute."

"Don't talk such nonsense, child," and all the same there was just a slight deepening of colour on the speaker's still pretty face. "Besides, as to the clock, it happens to have stopped."

"Why, so it has. Ha, ha! Never mind. I can tell by inward and invisible signs that it's very near lunch time indeed."

There was something of the metallic about the speaker's voice, whereas, that of the older woman was distinctly soft and pleasing. And then came the expected knock and ring.

"Here, I'd better clear," said the girl, mischievously, though not without a spice of malice.

"'After long years' isn't it, it's only fair you should meet again unhampered by the presence of a third and embarrassing party."

"Don't be idiotic, Muriel," was the reply, uttered with some tartness. "Stay where you are."

The answer was a low but ringing laugh, dashed with that same metallic clink. At any rate that was how it rang to the new arrival, who, thereupon, disliked the utterer of it even before he had seen her.

The meeting, as it happened, was absolutely commonplace. Durward was agreeably surprised to find that his relative had not changed so much for

the worse. She had put on a certain amount more weight, but it was the shapely comeliness of middle-age, and her abundant fair hair showed only a thread here and there of approaching greyness. They greeted each other cordially enough, and then he turned to the girl. Here there was scarcely any discernible likeness—and what there was lay in the hair and eyes. But the latter were hard, and the face was narrow, and somewhat hatchet-featured high-coloured withal. Further, though tallish, she was spare of flesh, having, indeed, what some of our contemporaries are fond of defining, as a "slender, girlish figure." The dislike which Durward had conceived for her through the ear was now deepened through the eye, and he realised that it was mutual.

They lunched in a pleasant, cheerful room, overlooking the little strip of garden at the back. But the summer dust lay thick upon the drooping laburnum and lilac leaves, and the lawn showed brown and dead. Durward remarked on this.

"Ah, yes. Town is a wretched place just now," was the answer. "I wish we could get out of it, only we don't know where to go."

Durward thought to detect a meaning in this, but he did not choose to play up to it. During the time they were at table they talked on general matters only, but he gathered that Muriel was given to the higher studies, and was ambitious to be a college woman and all that sort of thing. Further that she hardly could veil a professed contempt for the

dominant, but all the same inferior, sex. For this her mother mildly pulled her up.

"Muriel, child. You forget that Dr. Durward is a far from unfamed scientific man himself."

"Oh, yes. That's all right. But *we* don't get a look in. *We* don't get a fair show."

Durward made some placatory remark about various women having taken honours and so forth, then he eased the subject off into other grooves. But he was beginning to feel intensely bored, and heartily to wish he had never come; therefore, he was almost visibly relieved when the girl got up from the table and asked to be excused, on the ground of some appointment or other.

"I'll leave you and mother to entertain each other, Dr. Durward, if I may. And," she added, with a spice of subtle malice, "to talk over old times."

"Old times!" repeated Mrs. Filgay, with something also of a feeling of relief as the door closed behind her daughter, thought Durward, though the thought was dashed by another, that he was going to be put through a whole chronicle of all that had happened since they had last seen each other; of the virtues or vices—though the latter would have been, possibly, the more entertaining—of the dear departed, extending over all the years since they had last seen each other. "Yes. There's a lot of pathos in that word, Jack."

Incidentally the said "Jack" began to wonder if he could—without being too obviously mendacious—follow the example of the horrid girl (*his* mental

definition), who had just gone out, and invent a plausible lie. He foresaw a lugubrious vista of the doings of the late colonel or major, he forgot which. But he was out of it this time.

"Light up, Jack," she went on. "I hope you've got something to smoke with you, for I'm afraid I can't help you that way. But, have another 'peg,' and then we'll talk comfortably. Now then—to begin. How do you think I've—worn?"

"Devilish well," he answered, fully alive to the difference in her look and manner since the girl had relieved them of her presence. "In fact, better than I expected."

She laughed—naturally, and therefore, quite unaffectedly.

"That's candid—in the right direction. But then, you were always that."

"In the right direction?"

"Generally. Not always; but—always candid."

"I believe women think me rather brutal," he answered, cramming his pipe. "One reason why I'm chucking the general practitioning and going in for specialising. But—hang 'shop.' I didn't come here to talk that."

"You're very much the same yourself. You've 'worn' well, as you put it."

"Excuse me, as *you* put it."

She laughed again.

"Very well. We won't nag over trifles or anything else. You, too, have grown a little more staid and—stolid."

"Solid?"

"Stolid, I said. And—you've never married?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"No such idiot. Those who have, within the circle of my acquaintance, that is, are none the better for it. On the contrary, they are all the worse."

"All? No exceptions?"

"One in two hundred, perhaps—and that doubtful. Poor sporting odds in a sweep, isn't it?"

His tone had grown almost gruff, in explanation of which he was, as a matter of fact, beginning to feel secretly alarmed. Was she going to suggest delicately that they might as well take up their old relations? And that awful daughter, too? No, no. That would meet with a grim set-back. But he needn't have.

"Tell me about Selmingfold," she said. "I hear you are there a good deal."

"Yet, you have only lately landed."

The grimness wanted some wearing off still, you see.

She explained that she had heard about his movements from a mutual acquaintance whose existence he himself had almost forgotten.

"*You* ought to have been there—always I mean," she went on. Durward mentally set his teeth, and felt grimmer than ever. "What is this young Selmin like? I've never seen him."

"Oh, he's all right; very much all right. Still, you've hit it, Mabel. I ought to have been there."

He puffed out a lot of smoke, and she watched him through the great opaque clouds. She read his mood, but this was no time to play upon that string any further. She had just touched it, and that was sufficient—for the present.

"I would like to see the place," she went on meditatively. "Jack, do you think this Selmin would ask us down for a day or two? You're very thick with him, aren't you? And, after all, we are all related."

The word "us" pulled the other up with a round turn. Mabel Filgay would be all right; in fact, it would be rather jolly to have her about the place for a time. But that fearful girl—Muriel, wasn't her name?—no, no, he drew the line at her.

"I don't know. I daresay he would," he answered slowly. "I'll put it to him—when I get back."

"Do. The fact is we're longing for a change. Town *is* so beastly now, and, Jack—I don't mind telling *you*—the needful is rather scarce just now, and it doesn't seem good enough to go pigging it in some frightfully inferior country lodging. But a week or two at a place like Selmingfold—and, after all, we are relations. You understand?"

"Oh, perfectly," was the answer. "Well, Mabel, I'll see what I can do."

Curious how the sides of a triangle will meet. Mabel Filgay had reasons for bringing about the projected visit which she had no intention of disclosing to Durward. Durward had reasons for not

bringing it about, which he had no intention of disclosing to her. While—all unconsciously to himself—and equally all unconsciously to them—Selmin would have had reasons for not bringing it about.

And yet the three sides of the triangle were destined to meet—and form the triangle.

CHAPTER X.

THINGS MOVE.

SELMIN had plenty to do and plenty to think about. In view of his few months' accession everyone on the estate judged it the psychological moment for airing some grievance or some request. Even the few of the old people who had known him in bygone days reckoned it a good opportunity for trading on the fact, while the newer ones, calculating on what they thought his inexperience, sought to trade upon that. But they found themselves woefully mistaken. He thoroughly believed in the axiom, "Who pays the piper has the right to call the tune."

This appeared at every turn, but his principle never swerved. In his own immediate household the "trying-on" game began. But he would have none of it. He would have things done as he wanted them, and if people did not like it, their remedy was simple. They could go. For instance, when old Dayson took occasion to follow up his grumblings about people—and dogs—being allowed to use the paths through the game coverts, and even wander

off the paths, the answer was straight. He would not have anyone interfered with as long as they were not doing actual mischief. Those were his positive orders. Not be able to show a good head of game? Be held responsible? That was all right. Selmin knew exactly what the results would be in that line, allowing for all drawbacks, and would only hold him responsible to that extent. So the crusty old rascal, who had been egged on by Pierce, who wanted to step into his shoes, thought better of the notice he had intended to give if not allowed to have his own way and—did not give it.

Selmin did not see much of his county neighbours. The time for shooting and hunting, which would have brought him more into touch with them, was not yet; and it was pretty certain that those who were at home would not join him in the long country walks and the vivid appreciation of country scenes in which he delighted. But he did not delight in solitude. Therefore, it followed that he was thrown more and more upon the society of Captain Enscott and his daughter.

They had made a formal call upon him at Selmingfold, but to his intense disgust, at a time when he was out. However, he had invited them to dine quietly and they had accepted, and that was an evening he thought he had never known the equal of in his life.

The warm, vivid beauty of the girl had at first attracted him; but further acquaintance revealed more than that. She had such a natural, unaffected, and withal, sympathetic, way, about her that

appealed to him even more if possible than the outward charm. And she showed to such unflagging advantage at every turn. At the close of that evening his mind was made up. It remained to be seen what hers would be.

The dinner, though informal, was excellent—most things informal are. Lauretta looked sparkling, and her father was at the very acme of elderly enjoyment. No, decidedly Selmin did not want Durward back just then.

Just the three of them. There is a snug element about a trio when all understand each other, and these did. Selmin, sitting there, talking to his right hand, and beautiful, guest, easily and without the suppressed eagerness that he might have felt when ten years younger, was in the acme of enjoyment, too. It is a curious mixture of mundane fact, but the enjoyment of the good things of life certainly do tend towards the enjoyment of the more exalted and mental phase of enjoyment, but—there it is. The while the discreet Wade, who had been butlering at Selmingfold very nearly, but not quite, long enough, to remember Selmin in his younger days, was taking good care of the department which was especially his own.

"I tell you what, captain," Selmin said, when dinner was over. "We can't allow Miss Enscott to go away and sit by herself. So I move that, as it's a splendid warm night, we have the wine taken out in front and have our smoke there."

"I second that," said Enscott, heartily. "I'm

90287

not fond of overmuch indoors myself. Eh, Lauretta ? "

" Nor am I," came the ready answer. " That's a first-rate idea, Mr. Selmin."

It was, as he had said, a splendid night. The moon was nearly at full, and flooded the whole beautiful expanse of wood and field, and the foreground of Downs cutting the stars. The crown of Canonbury Link stood out in dark relief, and the line of the downs stretched away in misty dimness. In the covert below a fox barked, and little brown owls of foreign extraction, hawking for prey, uttered their fierce harsh cry almost overhead at times.

" This is too sweet," murmured Lauretta from the depths of a cane chair. Her eyes were shining, deep, luminous, in the reflection of the moon.

" How lovely the Downs show up in this light."

" Yes. By the way," said Selmin, suddenly struck with an idea; " do you ride ? "

" Why, yes. I bike quite a lot."

" No, I didn't mean that. I meant a horse. Of course, I know," he parenthised apologetically, " in England lots of people have no opportunity."

" As it happens I do—when I get the chance," she added, flashing a smile at him. " But it's a good while since I have."

" Well, then, these downs are splendid for a gallop. You can race all along the top of them for miles and miles. Now, I've got a gee that I believe

would carry you perfectly. May I take you for a ride some day?"

She did not answer at once. She broke into a laugh.

"The joke is," she explained, "that that reminds me of another joke. There was a girl staying with us at Chirol's the summer before last, and she suggested we should start from Canonbury Link and walk along the top of the Downs and over Croftonbury to Swatheling Beacon and back in the afternoon. She'd hardly believe me when I told her she was undertaking a walk of about two dozen miles, with ups and downs all the way. No, don't say what you were going to. She is a great friend of mine, and a lovely girl, with blue eyes and golden hair; and great on the out-door side into the bargain."

"I wasn't going to say anything, but I'm quite willing to take your vindication of your friend. But, you haven't answered my question. If that distance is too far for a walk, it isn't for a ride."

"Well, thanks. I really should enjoy it immensely."

"That's capital! Now, let's see! We never know how long this splendid weather is going to last, and there's nothing like making the most of it. Why shouldn't we say to-morrow?"

"It would be rather nice, and, as you say, this weather won't last for ever. But——"

"But, what?"

"I haven't got a habit."

"That doesn't matter. It isn't the Row. An

ordinary skirt'll do. You can sew a few stones into the rim to weight it."

She broke into a peal of laughter.

"You do seem to know about things, Mr. Selmin," she said, at last.

"Well, why not? Part of my life has been spent under circumstances where you learn resourcefulness. What astonishes me is the general absence of it among most people; in short the general stupidity."

Here a sudden and raucous sound rent the still air. The captain, who had been dozing placidly for the last ten minutes, had started awake.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "This sort of evening is soothing, eh, Selmin?"

"Very. Here, you are not filling up," answered Selmin. "Let me fill up for you."

"Why, thanks. This is very excellent port, very excellent, indeed," tossing down half a bumper. "I'm sorry to have been uncivil, but I'm getting an old man now, and forty winks after dinner is apt to creep upon me before I know where I am."

"That's all right, that's all right," was the answer.

"Being a lot in the open tends that way even when one's young," answered Selmin. "By the way, I was just asking Miss Enscott if she would let me take her for a gallop over the top of the Downs. I've got a horse that would carry her splendidly."

"Why, that's very kind of you, Selmin, very kind. I'm always afraid she'll be getting sick of being cooped up with an old fogey. But,

I say," suddenly becoming earnest. "It's a safe mount, eh? I haven't done with her just yet you know. Eh?"

"I'll answer for its safety," he replied.

"Of course, of course. You'll have had a lot to do with that sort of thing where you've been. You mustn't mind my mentioning it, though. This child, well—um—um—I spoil her shockingly, you know, abominably, in fact."

"Yes, yes, yes. That's all right," answered Lauretta, reaching out a hand, and putting it caressingly on the speaker's head. "But I should really enjoy that ride, Mr. Selmin. It's a long time since I've had one."

"Very well. Name your own time to-morrow. I can send over for you."

"How very jolly! I shall hardly sleep to-night for thinking of it. A gallop over those glorious Downs! You can skim along the roads on a bicycle, you know; but up there, plodding on foot, you feel utterly insignificant. Yes, I shall enjoy it."

"Good. Then I'll send the dog-cart over for you at two——What on earth am I talking about?" he broke off, in very real confusion. "I mean, I'll bring it—and we'll start from here."

"Thanks, Mr. Selmin. But there's no need to apologise. I daresay you've a lot to do and a lot to think about just now, and if you have any business on hand don't trouble to come yourself."

The answer was so naturally, so tactfully, made, Selmin appreciated it thoroughly.

"Well, as a matter of fact," he said, "I have some business that will keep me going all the morning. Still, I will make a point of picking you up myself."

But against this she protested, and that vigorously, and he ended by taking her at her word. And, after all, he did not want to seem to "rush" them too much.

"I'll get through with my agent as soon as possible," he said, "and, if I can't be there myself, at any rate, I shall be ready directly you are here."

"That's all right," she answered. "Of course you mustn't think of neglecting anything more important on my account. That arrangement will do first rate."

"Then that's a fixture. And I think it'll be like to-day," with a glance upward.

The night was aglow with myriad stars, and the line of the Downs cut the sky mistily. Every now and then a falling star would streak from the zenith, and over the moonlit fields and woods came the fierce, hunting shrieks of the little brown owls, together with a more melodious hoot of one native born. Selmin realised the placid contentment of possession. For instance, that possession had enabled him to map out a programme for the morrow which was entirely to his own satisfaction; and yet there were fools who prated about possession—or money, as they put it, but it amounted to exactly the same thing—not being able to procure happiness. Why, of course it could, and that all along the line.

Why, it could buy life even, and everything else, bar immunity from disease.

The captain's smooth after-dinner snores were again making a melody of their own upon the calm stillness of the night. Selmin suggested a stroll up and down the garden walk and the girl agreed. He, at any rate, felt thoroughly at peace, thoroughly happy. Should he say anything as to what was in his thoughts? No, he would not. There was time enough. He was old enough not to hurry anything. Ten years earlier there was no telling what he might not have done, but he had lived to some purpose, and now he decided to take the happiness of life, if it were really coming his way, scientifically. Yet he was not cold-blooded, not by any means. So as they walked up and down, and the great lamp of the nearly full moon sailed above them in the heavens, and the spangled field of blue velvet overhead flashed its own light to earth, and the air, sweet and fragrant with the moist dewy odour of wood and field, he took it all in and revelled in it.

"I've often wondered how it is," said Lauretta, "that people never seem to care for, or appreciate, night effects. They dress for dinner, and go into hot, stuffy rooms, and play bridge or some other idiotic game, just when Nature is at its best. But if you suggested the sort of walk you'd take in the afternoon, on a night like this, they'd think you mad."

"That's a good idea, and you're perfectly right. Now, for instance, supposing one got on the bikes

and left them in a cottage, and strolled up through the beech-woods under Canonbury, why, it would be perfect. But as you say, the bare proposal to do so would be looked upon as an act of lunacy."

"Yes. We don't often get this sort of night, and when we do I think that to let the opportunity slip is an act of lunacy."

"I know what we'll do," went on Selmin. "We'll get up a moonlight picnic, of course, if the weather lasts, and go right up on the Downs. How would that pan out?"

"Why it would be splendid."

"All right. We'll do it. But now, look here. You mustn't back out of it, when it comes to the point, will you?"

"Of course I won't. I think it would be delightful."

"Very well. That's settled. Hullo, I think your father has woke up," as a faint hail came through the still night.

They found Captain Enscott rubbing his eyes and apologising.

"'Pon my word, I must have had another forty winks. Awfully sorry, Selmin, but getting old, getting old, you know. That's a complaint nothing can cure. And such a splendid night. Lord, at sea I used to think of nights like this here in the Old Country; though they're scarce enough, even here, eh?"

Then they adjourned inside, and there was more talk, to the accompaniment of some syphon hissing,

and so on, and finally the captain's hired trap was ordered round.

"Good-bye," said Lauretta, as they clasped hands. "To-morrow, at two, then. But don't come yourself if it is inconvenient. Frankly, I mean it."

A final nod and a bright smile flashed in the moonlight. Selmin, gazing after the disappearing lights, knew that he certainly would come himself. Also, and again, he felt equally certain that he did not want Durward back just then.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHALK PIT—AGAIN.

THE following day kept up the promise of the night before; blue and clear, and altogether lovely. In the dewy sweetness of the early morning Selmin was already about, and the joy of life was upon him with its exceeding gladness. He had known hard times in his days, but mostly under healthful circumstances, yet still hard; and now he began to feel slightly uneasy as to the rush of prosperous ease which had so unexpectedly come upon him. It seemed too good to last, especially, as with it, had come in another element, which somehow his instinct told him was going to open up a new and entrancing vista of life which should last as long as life itself. Yet, it would not do to feel too much confidence, in life, or in oneself, or in anything or anybody else. Be it remembered he was not too young nor yet too old.

That morning he strove to concentrate his mind upon the agent and business. As a matter of hard fact, Selmin was not a particularly good man of

business, perhaps because he had been too much a man of action, though in a quiet sort of-way. So his gaze would wander out over the green gold country, where the haze merged into the flawless blue, and the while he was wondering if the graceful stag-like mount he had destined for Lauretta Enscott in the afternoon was not a trifle too fresh and beany. If she could keep him in hand he was perfect, but it occurred to Selmin that, with regard to her equestrian abilities, he was entirely and blankly ignorant. Yet this "idle rich" man contrived to put in a very strenuous morning, indeed. He would greatly have preferred to have got through the same time rounding up cattle, as he had done in his day, and that in any sort of weather. It was with very great relief, therefore, that he watched the business man folding up the last bunch of documents.

"Lunch at one, sharp, Mr. Bewsher," he said, snapping-to his watch.

"Why, thanks, Mr. Selmin, I hadn't arranged to stop," answered the other.

"Never mind. Stretch a point. I'm all alone, and you're not very specially pressed for time. It'll be an act of Christian charity to keep a lonely man company."

The other laughed, and fell in with the invite in the same spirit. He knew also that he might have gone further and fared—very much—worse.

"Is Dr. Durward coming back?" he asked, "or has he left altogether?"

"He went away for three days, and has stayed a fortnight. I expect him any day now," answered

Selmin. "He went to see about a new practice he's negotiating for."

"Ah! A clever man, Dr. Durward, a very clever man, so I've been told," answered the agent. "A great bacteriologist, they say. He'll become big in his line, I expect."

"Not a doubt of it," assented Selmin. "He's been throwing himself away in general practice. Specialising is his line, and now he's going in for it."

They talked on easily through lunch, about the county, about the people, about sport, and then the agent took his leave. Hardly had he done so than the dog-cart arrived, depositing Lauretta.

She was looking her very best, bright, sparkling, healthful, winsome.

"Well, have you got all the business behind?" she said, as he assisted her to alight.

"Yes. Bewsher has only just gone. Now I've nothing to think about except to enjoy—ourselves."

"Which is ungrammatical," she laughed.

"Of course it is. That all comes into the fun. By the way, don't want to kill me for asking, but can you ride something that's rather fresh? No vice, mind; but still a bit fresh."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure I can. Why, of course."

The horses were brought round. Lauretta broke out in admiration of the light, clean-built bay with the stag-like head, which was to carry her. It was restive, even though held, while Selmin put her up. But as they started, he observed, with secret uneasiness, that her seat in the saddle was not quite that of an accomplished horsewoman, and observing it,

wished he had had the beast exercised that morning for two hours instead of one.

She, for her part, observed that his seat in the saddle was that as of one who was part of the mount he bestrode. It was a large, powerful hunter, which could likewise have done with some more exercise. And the spirits of each acted as a spur upon the other.

"We'll walk them quietly till we get to the foot of the down," he said. "Then we can give them all the uphill blow they want. That'll take the ginger out of them. The fact is we pamper these English beasts far too much. When you've been in parts where your very life may depend on getting all you can out of a horse, you lose all that sort of sentimentality, I can tell you."

"I suppose so," she answered. "You have been a great traveller, Mr. Selmin. How do you find this humdrum life after all your knocking about?"

"I don't find it humdrum at all. I revel in it. You see, this part of the country has always stuck in my mind ever since I can remember. When I learned that I was going to own a slice of it for the rest of my days I was so knocked aback that I had to keep sticking pins into myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. By rights poor old Jack Durward ought to have been where I am, and I often think he feels sometimes sore that he isn't."

Selmin, you see, was waxing confidential.

"Really?" answered Lauretta. "That sounds like a bit out of a book."

"Doesn't it? Well, poor old Jack romps down

here whenever, and as long as he likes, and then he's got his trade, and I've got none, though I've done a good few different things in my time. So I suppose, after all, things turned out for the best. At any rate I know they did for me."

Lauretta did not ask about Durward, because, as it happened, she knew. From the time of first making Selmin's acquaintance, feminine-like, she had contrived to learn all about him, no matter how. But anything she had learned had not diminished her liking for him, her admiration even, which was growing. In fact he seemed to her the very ideal of all that a man should be. His unassuming, confident quiet powerfully appealed to her, as against the assertive, full-voiced, dashed with a touch of swagger, of so many of her other male acquaintances.

They had left the road below Arlington and had struck into a rough chalk path leading upward to the Downs, and soon the springy turf grew less steep. Then the wind-swept crown of Canonbury Link and the wondrous map-like panorama of the weald below, a panorama taking in three counties, as local tradition had it.

Then they let their horses out along the top of the Downs, the springy turf elastic under the bounding hoofs; away on their right, beyond a further green roll, the dazzling sparkle of the summer sea. On the left the widespread sweep of wood and meadow and eye-like pond. Or dipping into a combe where a chalk road ran along the down side like a ledge, between sparse, wind-swept hedges, and

a shepherd, crook in hand, was rounding up his flock with the aid of his well-trained collie. Here and there a wheatear flickered in and out of a rabbit hole, and a little red kestrel hung motionless against the wind in graceful poise. Lauretta was looking her very best, noted her escort. The swift passage through the air, the kiss of sunshine, brought out the warm sparkle of her mantling dark beauty. But he also noticed she was breathing somewhat hard.

"We'd better hold in," he said. "I fancy that horse is pulling a little too much for you, at first."

"Well, he's still a bit fresh," she admitted. "And I haven't ridden for some time."

"Of course. We'll pull up to a walk, and go easy."

"I'm afraid I'm showing up as a shocking duffer," she went on, though obviously relieved. "I suppose in the parts where you've been the girls can ride anything and anyhow."

"They can't, indeed. Make your mind easy on that score. Those who can are the exception rather than the rule. And your seat and hands are all right. It's only a question of being out of practice."

"Really?"

"Really."

"I'm glad," she answered. And she meant it, the more so that she realised that he was not talking to flatter her, or even out of mere encouragement. She had already recognised an element of calm, matter-of-fact, self-possession about her present companion, which would preclude him saying

anything he did not mean, almost as if it would be too much trouble to do so.

They paced on, talking on everything and anything, in the glow of the sunlight, taking no way in particular, but zig-zagging here and there and at will over the many-humped surface of the Downs, now at a canter, now at a walk. Finally they came up and back to the spinney-crowned Canonbury Link again.

"The worst of horse-riding in a country like this," Selmin was saying, "is that you can't get off at will and take it easy for half an hour. The brutes have to be held, and then they fidget and pull, so that you can't enjoy the view at all. Now, here, for instance, it's jolly to lie on the turf and take in all that; it's a spread one never gets tired of; but, under the circumstances, it would be more bother than it's worth."

"Well, I've enjoyed the afternoon gorgeously," she answered. "It was good of you to bring me."

"The other way about. Putting it on the lowest grounds I am rather lonely just now, and see what you've done towards lightening that."

She half-smiled to herself. Here was the matter-of-fact side showing out.

"You're like father in that. He hates being by himself for any length of time."

"That's easily understood. The circumstances of his sea life would have all made for gregariousness. Now I've had to be a great deal alone, and I can't say I prefer it. Take a solitary camp, for instance,

in other parts of the world, you've no idea how depressing it can become."

"Oh, I can form a very good one. I should not only feel depressed but positively scared."

"Well, there are times, under the circumstances, when you can find yourself bordering on feeling creepy, I admit. I don't know why such should be the case, but there is something in realising your complete solitude in the dark hours, that you are the only representative of the human race for heaven knows how many miles round; that gets upon you at times, even when you are tolerably used to it."

"I should think so, indeed," she assented emphatically. "I do believe it would scare me to death."

"I knew a man once who had been a pearl diver in the South Seas," went on Selmin, "and a 'hard case' he was, too, in every sense. He had no more nerves than a veteran trek ox, and yet he told me that sometimes when he was at the bottom of the sea he used to get the scare of his life. What at? Nothing at all, that's just it. Not sharks, for they used to come and almost nose round him; he didn't mind them in the least; but at the still, awful silence of the bottom of the sea, a feeling as if there was a Something coming out at him from those dim green depths, a Something terrific beyond imagining. Well, that's just the sort of feeling that you sometimes have to fight against in a solitary night camp, that there's a Something moving round you—watching you, in the darkness."

"Ugh! I can quite imagine it," she answered.

"The fact is," went on Selmin, "that nerves are

queer things, and I'm perfectly convinced that neither man—nor beast, for that matter—can ever absolutely answer for his own."

There and then came a confirmation of the remark. Suddenly, and without suspicion of their presence, from one of those depressions so common on the South Downs, arose a gang, a gang of trippist hooligans, male and female, of the most noxious, definitely poisonous, type. Some had exchanged hats, all were outraging the sweet summer air with raucous sounds, male and female. Lauretta's steed, being, as we said, in beany and unused condition, shied and pranced. This afforded ecstasies of delight to the poisonous herd, two or three of whom, let off, in their sweet innocent glee, some shrill, yet withal, throaty yells. That completed it. Lauretta realised that she was sitting a frantic, runaway horse, pulling and tearing, and shaking at its bit in such wise as nearly to jerk the bridle reins from her hands. She realised, also, that she must summon up, and keep, all the nerve she was capable of, as she felt herself rushing through the air at what seemed about a hundred miles an hour; further, that her aching wrists and numbing fingers were momentarily growing more utterly weak and incapable.

Selmin, for his part, was realising, first, that he would have given a considerable sum to have felt the presence of an eminently serviceable and long-barrelled and six-chambered old companion in his hip-pocket—here in peaceful England—so that he might have emptied all those six chambers into the whole of that vile mob; next, that if he meant to

stop the runaway he must not lose a flash of a second in starting to get ahead of the same.

Not to follow, but by a circuit to head it. He was, as we have said, mounted on a powerful hunter, and now was calculating the requisite sweep to be made to effect his purpose. The top of the down here was smooth and level, which was a disadvantage in that, had it been otherwise, provided the girl could keep her head and her nerve steady enough, she might have succeeded in turning the runaway beast up a steep slope, and so blowing it. But he doubted both her head and her hands, and his apprehensions were ghastly.

His own horse was going like the wind. Never, since it was foaled, had the honest beast experienced such a rowelling. But the light-limbed bay had its own pace on, and, holding on to the almost level ground, that told. In an agony of apprehension, Selmin thought to see the rider sway in her saddle, but still she kept her seat. And then, suddenly, there came to him an idea, a recollection, so dreadful, that it turned his heart to ice, and nearly caused him to fall from his horse.

The chalk pit!

Right in front it lay, the chalk pit, the *unfenced* chalk pit! the peril of which, to a runaway with rider, he and Durward had been discussing on that afternoon when we first saw them. And the bolting bay was heading straight for it with the speed of an express train!

Selmin hardly knew how he lived through that awful race. Sky, air, the vast landscape seemed to

race by and beneath him as though he were being whirled through a nightmare of delirium. And through it all, burning his brain, came back the words—the half doubtful words—spoken by her father:

"It's a safe mount, eh? I haven't done with her just yet, you know."

He could not do it. His horse stumbled violently, just saving itself. The runaway was going parallel with him. He could not do it, not by any effort Barely two hundred yards, to wit, hardly thirty seconds, and both would be over!

Then the miracle happened.

A man sprang up, right from the brink of the chalk cliff, a strongly-built, powerful man, and sprang to the head of the runaway. It, unable to halt, swerved suddenly, this time shedding its rider, whom, with incredible swiftness and dexterity, this new factor in the situation was enabled to receive and lower unhurt to the ground. Followed a heavy thud sixty feet beneath. The bay horse had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

"—— BY DURWARD."

"DURWARD!"

The name came gaspingly from Selmin's shaking lips and dry throat, as he flung himself from the saddle, his streaming, quivering steed standing with head down and panting, utterly unmindful of the reins merely thrown on its neck after its soul-bursting gallop. Then he was beside his charge.

"None the worse, are you, for God's sake?" he queried.

"N—no," answered Lauretta, who was sitting up. "I was rather scared, though. But where's the horse?"

"Oh, he's run away. Never mind about him."

The trio were all looking somewhat strange. Lauretta was looking curiously at the two men. Then commonplace came to relieve the situation.

"Miss Enscott, this is my cousin, Dr. Durward," introduced Selmin. The other bowed, Lauretta extended her hand.

"You did help me splendidly," she said. "I don't

believe I could have kept my seat much longer. So many thanks."

Both men exchanged a half-furtive, sidelong glance. It was obvious that she was entirely in the dark as to the nature of her real peril.

"Well, you kept it splendidly so far," said Selmin, warmly. "But I blame myself, even more, if possible, than those loathsome excrescences on the scheme of creation," with a jerk of the head backward. "I should never have allowed you to ride that horse. The brute was far too fresh—and pampered," he added, viciously. And then he began explaining to Durward the circumstance that had directly caused the runaway.

"No—no. You mustn't blame yourself," said the girl. "It was all through meeting with those horrors. Let's see if we can see anything of the horse."

Both men made an instinctive step to bar her way. They did not want her to discover the brink of the chalk pit, and see below what she would see.

"Never mind about him," said Selmin. "He'll be found all right. Don't worry about that. Now I suggest we drop down on Warnington. There's a decent inn there where we can get tea—and other things. It's only just below here at the foot of the down, Miss Enscott. Do you feel equal to the walk?"

"Why, of course. I'm not in the least injured, thanks to—Dr. Durward," with a bright smile at the latter.

"When did you turn up, Jack?" asked Selmin, passing his arm through the bridle reins of his horse, to lead that still panting animal.

"Why, not long after you'd gone out. Stuart brought me down in his car. We 'drew' you at the house, but drew blank, so I got him to bring me on as far as Warnington, and got out for a stroll up the Downs. Get rid of that stuffy air of town, you know. He's gone on to Dorrington."

"Well, I expected you earlier, old chap," said Selmin. "I'd about begun to give you up."

Was there a certain unconscious inflection in the voice, or was it a vague indefinable air of constraint between the two, that struck upon Lauretta's subtle feminine intuition? It might have been, but she was conscious of it, all the same.

Selmin, though talking evenly, was conscious of a very unwonted medley of thought and feeling in the workings of his inner mind. During that awful race for her life had it come home to him irresistibly what it would mean to him did that race end unsuccessfully. And this was just what it had done. But for Durward she would even now be lying, a shattered heap, at the bottom of the chalk pit. No, that would not bear thinking about—and yet—and yet—Durward had stepped in to snatch back her life just where he himself had been instrumental in imperilling it. This was a side to his meditations which somehow caused, although he took himself to task for it, a vague but real and growing, uneasy qualm.

And Durward?

Durward, as the trio took their way down the steep chalk and turf path, was rather silent, but he was thinking "furiously." He was thinking—to begin with—that he had just seen the most lovely and altogether the most attractive girl he had ever seen in his life; and he had seen as many girls as most people. He was thinking—to go on with—that Selmin seemed to have all the luck in life. First, he had captured Selmingfold, next he had captured—this. Or, at any rate, it seemed so. He was thinking, in the next place, of the chalk pit and its high, dangerous brink, where but a fortnight ago the two had been standing together and the brain cloud began to swirl around again; but there—he did not want to think of that. So he switched off the vein of thought by thinking something else—to wit, that it was he, after all, who had been the instrument of rescue, not Selmin, who, if anything, had been the instrument of bringing about the danger. There was something satisfying in this side of it, and he hugged the idea to himself accordingly.

The while the other two were keeping up a conversation, but Durward's now sharpened ear took in that it had not the tone in it that pointed to an already set up and growing understanding. So far good, but Durward was puzzled. Quietly observant, he took in every detail of the girl's physical charm, no less the more subtle one of her capacity for the other kind of draw. But in this his keen judgment convinced him that, whatever might be Selmin's attitude, hers was certainly one of predilection for Selmin. Yet it would have required an expert to

discover this. Durward flattered himself that he was an expert.

Lauretta, for her part, felt concerned, consequently constrained. Her immediate companion was worried, naturally, over the temporary loss of his horse; for, of course, that was how she regarded it. It was probably a valuable horse; certainly it was a good one, for she had quite forgiven it for running away with her, and only hoped it would be safely recovered. Anyhow, she had most thoroughly enjoyed the ride. But she hoped it would be found and brought back; why, certainly it would. In a country like England, a valuable horse like that could not be stolen and there would be a substantial reward for its return. It would be sure to be brought back. Something of this she told Selmin. He awakened there and then from taciturnity.

"Oh, bother the horse!" he answered, with quite a genial smile. "The brute ought to be shot, but—er—I wasn't thinking of that. What I was thinking of was that I assured your father he was a safe beast, and so on, and—look what happened."

"But, nothing happened," she rejoined, also with a smile, for her quick feminine ear caught a something in the tone; a something which perhaps did not displease her.

"No—thank the Lord!—or anybody you like—it didn't," he answered quickly, as he thought of what she did not know, the certain death from which she had been so narrowly rescued—by Durward. "To tell the truth, I was thinking very much of my

responsibility to your father, and what he will say when he hears about it."

A bright, frank laugh broke from her, and her eyes sparkled.

"But he needn't hear about it," she said. "Why should he? He's getting old now. Why should we worry him unnecessarily?"

Selmin's face cleared. He had been concerned, dejected even, over the thought that this would mean their first and last experience of any undertaking together. Again those words came into his mind, and in view of them would the captain entrust the apple of his eye to such a sorry caretaker as he himself had proved? Her next words brought him inexpressible comfort.

"We'll have some more rides together," pronounced Lauretta. "I daresay you've got something more quiet in the stable—you see, I'm a poor horseman. There—look at me—inviting myself," she broke off, but her absolute naturalness was positively entrancing. "And you don't know how I enjoyed that one, so far."

"Some more? I should rather think we would—if you're on," said Selmin, with quite unusual animation. "I'll take jolly good care there are no more risks of that kind."

"That's awfully nice of you. So we'll just keep the whole thing to ourselves."

All of which conversation Durward, walking immediately behind, was "enjoying." Enjoying—for did we not say above that he had just seen the most altogether attractive girl he

had ever beheld in his life? And he had just saved her.

Lauretta was enchanted with the village inn at Warnington, or rather with the garden thereof, where they sat among flowerbeds, and wasps, and under apple-trees; and with the splendid crescent of sunlit green and gold downs, and hanging woods clustering up to their base, as she dispensed tea from a wooden table.

"You know," she said, "although we have been here two summers, I never get so far afield as this. Father has never learnt to ride a bicycle, and I don't care about riding alone—at least not any distance, that is. I've been through here once, though—with the girl I was telling you about, Mr. Selmin, who wanted to walk along the top of the Downs, from Canonbury Link to Swatheling Beacon. Then, by the way, we did some out-all-day rides, to Dorrington, by those two picturesque old mills—heather and pines and all that. It was lovely. Now I only ride the bike for purposes of utility into Steynhurst for supplies and so on. But I do enjoy this."

To both her hearers perhaps, for both were calculated, by the natural circumstance of their experience, to be appreciative of the humour of tragedy, it may have occurred that here was contrast. This beautiful girl, talking so freely with such a thorough and whole-hearted sense of "the joy of living," was absolutely and entirely ignorant that but for the prompt readiness of one of them she would at that moment have been lying a crushed and shattered heap up there on the down. It may have

been that the very sense of this may have rendered both a trifle taciturn. This Lauretta was quick to remark.

"I believe, Mr. Selmin, you're still worrying over your runaway horse," she said. "But it'll surely be found and brought back. You said so yourself."

Selmin pulled himself together with a start.

"Really I'm not, Miss Enscott. I'm absolutely enjoying myself. You don't mind this? No? Thanks." And he began to fill his pipe.

It was true, moreover. She had pulled out the wrong stop that time. Selmin had dismissed the affair of the horse clean from his mind, though he had by no means dismissed from it the ghastly, blood-curdling peril from which the speaker had been rescued—by Durward. As a matter of fact, Selmin, though a fine rider and a first-rate whip, cared little for horses as such. To him they were merely means of locomotion. He was a good judge of horseflesh and would have nothing inferior or palmed off, in that line. But he would not spare it when it was a question of getting work out of it. If a beast was fed well, it had got to work well, he would say; and his were fed well, perhaps too well, as the above averted tragedy might go to show.

But the remark had given him an idea—or rather revived one—for he had been cogitating it all the way here since the incident. Leaving the other two he went round to the front of the inn.

"Look here, Hales," he said, having drawn the landlord apart, "I want a certain job done—quietly and without talk, you understand, and it'll be worth

everybody's while who's concerned in doing it," and then he put the man in possession of all the facts. Hales was partly amazed, partly amused.

"You see," impressed Selmin, "I don't want this thing to become public—perhaps get into the papers, you understand; and the finding of a horse's carcase all splintered up, and with a lady's saddle on board it, would raise a hell of a lot of scribble and talk. So I want you to send up two or three reliable men to-night, with a waggon and bring it away. I don't care what you do with it afterwards, you can bury it or sell it to the Crawshay and Clancehurst kennels, for all I care—or anything you like. But I want the affair kept dark. See?"

The landlord did see—it was made worth his while there and then *to* see—and he had reason to think it would be made still more so in the near future if he carried out instructions. So he promised. As to the eccentricity of the proceedings, why Selmin had already set up a reputation in that line, but he had been away a lot in "furrin' parts"; besides, was he not Selmin of Selmingfold, and had not his old great uncle been eccentric enough before him? So Hales undertook that his wishes should be carried out explicitly.

"That'll be all right, Mr. Selmin," he said. "I'll see to it all. Don't you worry."

It is a curious thing that meanwhile, between the pair left alone together, conversation had flagged. Durward had got a mood on; he was subject to such, and Lauretta found it difficult to reply to monosyllables or laconics. Now this may have

accounted for the quick smile which lit up her face as Selmin reappeared. But, at any rate, that was not how Durward read it.

"I don't know what to do about you, Miss Enscott. Hales says he hasn't got any traps in just now, and if I send over to my place for one it may take any time. It's only about two miles to walk, if you feel up to it."

"But I should love it," answered the girl. "Rather, I should. I'm as fresh as paint, and look what a sweet evening it is!"

"Sure? Well, I can drive you back from there easily enough. I'll leave my beast here and send for him to-morrow, and we'll have a jolly walk. And, as you say, it's a divine evening."

And so they started homeward. It is quite possible that given the two of them together it might have been, as Selmin had put it, "a jolly walk." But somehow, with a third, that element seemed lacking. For Durward was the third, and he was in one of his moods.

And that mood for the present purpose resolved itself into one question—or, to be accurate, two. Was Selmin to have everything—everything—Selmingfold, and this girl, whose life he himself had just saved?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMING OF THE FILGAYS.

"I SAY, Jack. Who the devil *are* these people?"

Thus, Selmin, in no very satisfied tone, chucking a letter he had just been reading across the table to Durward.

"Oh, they're sort of distant relatives," answered the latter evenly. "I saw them while I was up in town the other day. I knew Mabel Filgay as a girl, and she's a widow now."

"Well, as far as I can make out—and she writes such a damnably bad hand—she wants to come down here for a stay. Also, so far as I can make out for the same reason, it appears she's got a girl. What are they like?"

But for the incident and averted tragedy of a day or two ago, Durward's reply would have been of a very different nature. Now he saw advantages in the one he made.

"Oh, Mabel has 'kept' very well, and is very jolly. Nothing of the old crock about her at any rate."

"I don't know. I should have thought from her letter there was. She launches out into superfluous rigmarole which takes a magnifying glass to decipher. That's not promising. But the question is, shall we have them or not?"

Selmin's tone was not, well, best tempered. It was one thing to get a brace of unknown relatives—female—into the house, and quite another to get them out of it. They might be most insufferable bores or they might not; but at any rate they would hamper his freedom of action, and he did not want any sort of hampering just then. Durward, for his part, was thinking exactly the same thing, but from an antithetical point of view.

"I think if I were you I should," he answered. "Mabel Filgay's a good little soul, and I don't think she'd bore you. The fact is, too, it would be an act of Christian charity to give her a change—free, gratis, and for nothing— in the shape of a week or two here. She's none too flush, and you know what town is at this time of the year."

He had pulled out the right stop that time. No argument could have been more calculated to appeal to Selmin than the picture of a social equal and a relative being condemned to stew in London, and the dog days, for want of the needful, when by a stroke of the pen, he could get them out of it.

"All right," he said. "I'll drop 'em a line and tell them to come as soon as they like—if only I can make out this infernally undecipherable address," picking up the letter. "What is it—Unsosa Road?"

"Mimosa."

"Well, it might have been anything. Just look at it!"

"Yes, I found it difficult to make out myself," answered Durward.

"By the by," said Selmin, suddenly; "what's the girl like?"

"Oh, just ordinary," answered Durward, struggling with the instinct to reply "abominable." But that would never have done.

"Flapper stage, I suppose?"

"About that."

"Well, we'll get them down. Funny thing, Jack, but this'll be my first experience of starting a house party on my own. Rum, isn't it? We might add two or three more to the number, but I draw the line at bores. You say this—er—Mrs. Filgay isn't a bore?"

"Yes. I shouldn't call her that," was the answer.

"Now, look here, Jack," said Selmin. "I'll make a bargain with you. If we get this lot down here *you'll* have to keep them amused. They're *your* pals, you know, not mine. And just now, to be perfectly frank, I don't seem to want to be bothered with strangers."

"Oh, that'll be all right," answered the other easily. "I'll take 'em off your hands whenever you like."

"That's a bargain then. Well, I'll write and ask them."

There was joy in the semi-detached with the undecipherable address, when Selmin's letter came. The laburnums and lilac were becoming more dust

laden than ever, and the faces of both mother and daughter were getting colourless and washed out.

"This is splendid," said the former. "How soon can you get packed, Muriel?"

"I don't know. But don't let's seem to rush it. Let's see the letter. Yes, it's all right, but reads rather stilted and priggish," scanning it narrowly.

"Oh, nonsense! Why, Jack Durward says he's awfully nice. And, Muriel. Why don't you try to get rid of that supercilious, snappy way of talking about and looking at everything. Men hate it, I can tell you."

"Do they? Then they're welcome to. I'm not going to kow-tow to any man; numskulled, conceited lot of beasts as most of them are. Not I."

"Well, you're only cutting your own throat, and here might be a chance."

"A chance! Pouff! I expect this one will be no better than the rest, except that he'll have swelled head on the strength of his sudden and unexpected good luck."

"Well, rush it or not, we'll go down the day after to-morrow," said Mrs. Filgay. "I've had quite enough of this broiling heat, I can tell you."

"Oh, all right! I daresay I can manage," answered the girl, who really was as anxious to get a change as her mother was. But the born spirit of opposition had become a habit.

"Why shouldn't it be to-morrow, though?" went on her mother, as if struck by a sudden thought. "Yes, we'll make it to-morrow. And I do want a change."

When Selmin and Durward met the two at East Welstead Station by the 3.30 with a roomy waggonette, driven by the former, the situation was not without its comical side. Three of the quatrain were wondering what the other, and others, would be like, the fourth was wondering how these new elements would fuse.

"This is delightful, Mr. Selmin," began Mabel Filgay, with almost a girlish enthusiasm. Poor thing! It was a god-send to her to breathe the sweet air of the country—and such country! Away, in front, the crescent arc of the Downs; green, rolling; and between, a billowing swell of field and wood. There had been a shower, but the sun was bursting out now through leaden clouds, darting a lightning-like ray upon dripping hedgerow, and waking myriad pearls from the grass-laden raindrops. And the pure, fresh country scent! Then along, between irregular tossing hedges, then the high, iron fence of a deer park, where the bracken clustered thickly in velvety clumps. A church on the left, then a sudden swing round to the right, through a tiny hamlet; another swing round to the left on a broad and tarred high-road, with a whizzing motor or two shaving past—as the way is with these instruments—and nearer now the glorious Downs curved in front, a livid curtain of thunder cloud rising from the sea behind.

Muriel Filgay, seated in the waggonette, had not much eye for the scenic beauties so lavishly mapped out around her. In fact, her energies had been mainly concentrated in "sizing up" her host—

and, incidentally, distant relative—as he sat on the box handling his horses with masterly skill, and the result of that "sizing up" was wholly favourable. Her mother and Durward were chatting easily together about anything or nothing, but she was intent on observation of a different kind. Yes, the result of that observation was favourable. As men went, this one was decidedly above the average, was her verdict. Then her mother's words came back to her. The snappy way would not go down with this one, she could see that. And, in the course of that drive the schemer, which is in every woman, began to strike root into the little soul of Muriel Filgay—she did not think it little, but that is a detail.

"Here we are," said Selmin, turning in at an open gate. "Welcome to Selmingfold!"

"Oh, but—it's lovely!" burst from Mrs. Filgay in genuine admiration, as her glance took in the beautiful panorama, also the many-gabled house. "And after that ghastly, dust-smothered Hampstead. Do you know, Mr. Selmin, it's awfully kind of you to have asked us down?"

Muriel frowned—frowned blackly. Did her mother forget the presence of the groom on the box, seated beside his master who was driving, that she should give away for the subsequent benefit of the whole *matériel* that they were only "poor relations"? It was criminally idiotic of her, and she should hear more about it presently. And Selmin, turning his head just at that moment, caught that frown as he said something pleasant and laughing in answer to the remark.

If Muriel had entertained hopes of what her mother had called "a chance," she might have shed them then and there, and that even if Captain Enscott and his daughter had never heard of Chirol's Farm in the neighbourhood. If there was one thing that Selmin utterly detested in the other sex it was temper. That one look had given away the whole thing. Here was a young person who, in his estimation, should have been exterminated at birth. He had not been favourably impressed with her from the first; the thin, hatchet-faced type did not appeal at any time. Nor did the high, domineering ring in the voice. By the time they had all alighted and entered the front hall he had already voted this girl utterly detestable and was wondering how the devil he was going to force himself to be ordinarily civil to her. To her mother he took no such antipathy. She struck him as being just an ordinary sort of female, but not aggressive; and then, after all, had not Durward undertaken to keep them off his hands? For all that, he did not want them just then, and wished them both at Jericho, or back in Mimosa Road, or anywhere else but there. Now, Muriel Filgay was sharp enough in ways, and she read her host's instinctive dislike of herself, and thereupon hated him—furiously, venomously, wholeheartedly.

But she laid herself out to make herself very agreeable to him, and was about as successful as a donkey who should undertake to play a cathedral organ. And her idea of doing so was twofold: first, to monopolise the conversation; second, to

instruct him on every subject under the sun. Selmin writhed.

"Good heavens, Jack!" he burst forth, flinging himself into his usual chair in the smoke-room after his guests had gone to bed. "Good heavens! What on earth am I going to do with these dreadful people? The old woman I can stick, but the girl! And yet you said they wouldn't bore me."

"I'm sorry," said the other, though not very cordially. "You see, I hardly know the girl, and I can't say she made a first-rate impression on me. But—well, probably they won't stay long."

"Well, I tell you what it is. I'm going to get myself wired for on urgent business, and leave you in charge."

"You can hardly do that. It'll look fearfully uncivil."

Selmin felt utterly cornered. What a fool he had been to give way to a passing freak of good nature. The enforced company of two people, to one of whom he had taken a pronounced antipathy, for some days at least, was certainly nothing to look forward to, yet it would be his lot to-morrow and the next day, and the day after that, and so on.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MOONLIT WOOD.

THERE was an inn by the roadside which conveyed the idea of being smaller than it really was, and of being mainly built of wood. Behind it were fields and woods, opposite it, across the road, were fields and woods. In front of it, seated on a wooden bench and at a wooden table, were Selmin and Lauretta Enscott and Muriel Filgay ; and in front of them, tea—and other things.

It was late afternoon, evening in fact. The sun was beginning to show signs of declining early. A brake load of trippers was beginning to fill up for its return journey, and by twos and threes its occupants were tailing out of the front door, in various phases of exhilaration, to quarrel over their places in the big waggonette. At last, with a badly-sounded yelp from a long horn, the vehicle took the road, and once more there was peace.

"What a perfectly hateful mob," said Muriel. "I don't know where such awful creatures come from."

"Well, they are rather trying, but I suppose they manage to get some enjoyment from their outing," answered Selmin. "At any rate, they leave *us* the fields and woods, and confine themselves to the roads and pubs—which spells peace to us. Shall we move on?"

This was carried, and so they took their way out behind to the path which led over fields, with the background of the Downs in the near distance. The sun was sinking, and already there was a filmy mist rising over the meadows, and the field-path was wet and dewy.

"Let's go back through the wood," suggested Lauretta. "The moon will be up directly, and it'll be splendid under the trees."

"But what about distance?" said Selmin. "We've a considerable walk in front of us."

They had come right across country; had, in fact, taken that most delightful species of walk of all, not knowing where they were going or how they were going there. But they were several miles from home.

Across dewy fields they took their way. Selmin had suggested a short cut, but it proved to be not so short, for they got into a miry lane, and then, where a gap in a hedge should have been, lo!—it was stopped with high, stiff blackthorn, which necessitated a much wider circuit. By that time twilight had fairly set in.

"What's all this yarn in the papers," said Muriel, "about bloodcurdling and mysterious screams being heard in a wood round here—Cholney way, wasn't it?

I saw it in the *Mail* yesterday. And we're not far from that, are we?"

"Yes, there was something of the kind," answered Selmin. "Probably it was the egregious hoot of some new-fangled motor-horn, and the *Mail* is ever agog for 'copy,'"

"But they said it was some animal, and people had turned out to hunt it—with guns."

"Yes, and if it had been, they'd have got it," returned Selmin. "These woods, though large enough as pheasant coverts, and jolly enough to wander about in, are no sort of harbourage for any animal of the wild and dangerous sort. Any fool could find it there without the slightest difficulty. You're not scared, though, are you?"

"Oh, no. Not while we've got male escort," returned Muriel, in a tone that was meant to be arch.

She—and her mother—had been at Selmingfold three or four days by now, and although he had not taken to the girl, he had forced himself to make the best of her. Besides, on thinking things over, he was sorry for her, sorry for both of them. The man who knocks about in strange wild parts is rarely hard; perhaps because he knows too well what the hard side of life really means; though he is just the one to be hard as teak if taken the wrong way. So things had wagged along fairly pleasantly.

Another thing, the two had taken to Lauretta Enscott, which was an advantage in that it facilitated all sorts of little jolly informal arrangements which Selmin had planned. Incidentally this was one of

them—several miles out and several miles back by way of a walk ; the very thing he thoroughly enjoyed, and both the girls were good walkers.

The occurrence to which one of them had made allusion had been reported in several of the country papers, and in one or two of the London ones. Weird, mysterious sounds had been heard at night issuing from this or that wood, in their own immediate neighbourhood. A party of farmers, and a keeper or two, had turned out with guns one night, on a special hunt for the mystery, and, it was reported, had been rewarded by the sight of a shadowy shape, clearing a stile just in front.

" Why the devil didn't the idiots open a broadside on to it ? " had been Selmin's comment to Durward, as he read it in the paper one morning in the smoke-room. " But I don't believe a word of it. It's some damned motor-horn trying to imitate a sea-sick cow, along one of the roads, that they heard—one of these infernal new-fangled things that ought to be forbidden by police regulation. That's about the secret of the mysterious beast, you may depend upon it."

Now, for the first time, as they entered the wood, Selmin began to wonder if there might not be something in it—some beast that had escaped from a menagerie, perhaps. Well, that would not be formidable. He had hunted dangerous game in other countries, and knew that such would almost invariably take to flight before the human form erect. Then he ceased to give the matter another thought.

The wood they were entering was a fairly large one,

as English game coverts go. Likewise the rides were rather irregular and you had to be sure of your points, or might very easily get off the way. Selmin had never been in it before, and of course his two companions were absolutely useless for any purpose of making sure of the bearings under the circumstances.

"No. I've made a miscalculation," he said, coming to a dead stop. "We must hark back down this ride, and try again. There ought to be a gap just below here, from what the pub-keeper told me."

They went back along the ride. It was rough going, for the ground was very dry, all ridges and horse-hoof marks; in wet weather it would have been a veritable Slough of Despond.

"It's rather a joke being lost," declared Lauretta. "Lost in a wood, too. Sounds quite the correct and adventurous thing."

"Yes, only the really correct and adventurous thing wouldn't be any joke at all," Selmin answered. "Well, the next thing is to find this gap. Ah, that looks like it. Come along."

It was not dark yet, and a glorious harvest moon was flooding down through the trees. A belated pheasant, winging noisily to his roost, croaked and clattered. The undergrowth, consisting mainly of hazel or ground ash, was sparse, so there was no shut-in darkness about the place. Yet there was that shadowy mysterious suggestion of a great wood in the moonlight, which was perhaps the reason why the two girls kept remarkably close to their escort.

"Ah! Now we've got our bearings," remarked the latter, holding up his hand, as a not very distant

chime came through the still air. "That's from the steeple of Gateminster Monastery. Our way is due west. You see, you never can get away from the civilised in this country, however all alone it may seem at the time."

"No," assented Lauretta. "But—what's that?"

She had stopped dead, and so had the other girl. Both were listening intently. So, too, was Selmin.

In the depth of the wood on their left front came a sound, a very strange sound; instinctively a terrifying sound.

"What is it?" broke from both girls.

The sound was approaching still on their left front. It was no human sound, that was obvious. It was a sort of muffled coughing roar, yet not exactly a roar. To Selmin it was no mystery, but, at the same time, to him it carried suggestions, apprehensive ones. In the moment he was trying to negotiate a plan.

A long, lithe shape slipped out into the moonlight of the ride. Then it stopped short, becoming aware of their presence; faced them, crouched and snarled. And it was barely sixty yards away. Selmin recognised a fairly fine specimen of the *genus* panther. A real, live panther in an English game covert! Well, his theory as to an escaped beast was borne out at any rate. But, meanwhile, the said escaped beast was crouching there, its tail waving viciously to and fro, its snarl waxing louder, and its appearance uncommonly threatening. In the vivid moonlight, too, the spots on its beautiful skin stood out clearly defined.

"I'm going to test a theory of my own," he said. "Stand still here, both of you and see. If it fails, streak up that ride on the left, and screech and yell as loud as you like. I'll answer for it you'll be safe. But meanwhile, stand here, and don't move. Can you manage that?"

Lauretta whispered that she thought they could. The other answered nothing.

The beast was now snarling louder than ever, and its tail was flogging the ground more viciously. Its jaws were opened almost till no head was visible from the front view, and it was gathering all its muscles for a spring. It was simply a cornered cat.

"Stand still. Don't move, whatever you do—unless——" was Selmin's parting injunction.

He advanced slowly, but deliberately and straight, towards the crouching beast. He uttered soothing words, just as though he were trying to induce a shy cat to come to him. Twenty, ten yards, and then the amazed girls beheld what they could hardly credit. He was bending over this escaped wild beast, which had thrown itself over on its side, and was caressing its head and ears, for all the world as if it had been a dear, delightful, woolly pussie at his own fireside. And it had ceased to snarl, and was rubbing its head against his hand in precisely that character. No, indeed, they could hardly believe their sight.

This went on for some little time. Their knees, which had been knocking together in an effort not to collapse beneath them, grew steady again. No,

they could hardly realise it. An insane, hysterical impulse came upon the pair to come forward and join in the play.

"No. Stand where you are," warned Selmin, perceiving this, but without raising his voice. "Now, go along that ride. I'll overtake you in a minute."

When they had obeyed him, he said a few more caressing words to the now pacified animal.

"Go away home, now, puss, puss!" he concluded, pointing, but with no sudden or rapid movement, to the wood in the opposite direction to that which the girls had taken. The animal got up, looked at him, its tail still waving, then went quietly away through the wood, looking back once or twice as though loth to leave. He waited until it was out of sight before he moved.

"Are you a magician, Mr. Selmin?" answered Lauretta, breathing quickly, as he rejoined them in the moonlit ride.

"Come along. We'll be out in the open fields directly. Here's our gap!"

He helped them through the same. They were now in a large field, and dimly in front, at no great distance, stood the buildings of Gateminster Monastery, its tall spire darting upward to the moon.

"You needn't be afraid," he went on, seeing the quick, nervous glances they kept throwing behind. "It won't come out into the open. We've done with it."

"But—what on earth miracle did you work?"

went on Lauretta. "I should never have believed it if anyone had told me."

"Well, I'm not going to put on swagger about it," replied Selmin. "The fact is, there was a crucial moment when it was very much touch and go indeed, and I knew it. But my idea is this. I am extremely fond of animals, cats especially. I can generally get them to come to me when they won't look at other people. Now a panther is a cat—very much a cat—and it suddenly struck me that if I took this beast the right way, it might simplify the situation. And it did."

"Oh, I hate cats!" said Muriel.

"Well, it's lucky *I* don't," rejoined Selmin, quietly; "for I'm sure that's what saved the situation."

Lauretta said nothing. But she—looked.

They crossed the open field in the clear moonlight. In front the tall spire of the monastery loomed mistily, still nearer. Suddenly something rose from the grass with a stealthy rush. Muriel screamed.

"It's all right," said Selmin, reassuringly. "It's only a fox. Look at it, streaking away there. Nothing to be afraid of. I love all the animal world, only there isn't enough of it."

"Oh, I thought it was that dreadful beast come back again," answered the girl, with a shudder, and glancing quickly over her shoulder. But Lauretta had been entirely unmoved, except that she had gazed at the gliding; retreating form of Reynard with interest and admiration.

"So do I," she said. "But, Mr. Selmin, what

are you going to do about that escaped beast? It may be rather dangerous, to the cottage people for instance."

"I don't think so. It can capture plenty of rabbits, and a fowl or two, and as long as it's fed it won't bother humans. But I'll send round word to-night about it, and then the whole countryside will turn out after it. Poor beast! Do you know, since it took to me so kindly, just like a big, tame pussie-cat, I seem to have grown quite fond of it. I believe I'd like to buy it, and keep it tame."

Muriel uttered a gasp—one of horror and repulsion. Lauretta looked at him strangely, keenly. Said the first:

"Fancy keeping a horrible wild beast as a pet. It doesn't sound right, Mr. Selmin; and then, think how dangerous for other people."

To this he made no reply. But Lauretta was smiling, strangely, darkly. She was thinking of a rare exhibition of power—of a man totally unarmed, going up to a snarling, dangerous beast in a moonlit wood, and actually caressing it into a stage of purring placidity. Yes. Power. That was it. But Selmin had not a notion as to what she was thinking about. If he had had such a notion—well.

And thus they took their way homewards in the moonlight through byeways and hedges. And as they did so an idea came to Selmin. Was it destined that every time this girl was under his care she was to incur danger? The last time was the incident of the runaway horse, which they had agreed to say nothing about. This time, however, he could in no

sense be held responsible; and a sneaking sense of complacency came into his mind. He did not care to bind her to secrecy with regard to this incident. In fact, he was not altogether sorry that it had happened.

But only he himself knew what a terrific strain upon his nerve the situation had involved, and as to this he said nothing.

CHAPTER XV.

HALF A DAY.

ONE thing became patent to Durward with regard to his relative. The latter had become curt, restless, almost irritable; in fact, totally unlike his former placid, philosophical, easy-going self. And the reason of it he diagnosed without any difficulty at all.

The while Selmin held him to his bargain, that he should take the two guests off his hands. They were welcome to stay, since it was to their advantage to do so, but they bored him. Now Selmin's temperament was one of those which turned restive under boredom. He pleaded business, so that they seldom met except at table, and then, he decided, it was an ordeal. The girl's pert, assertive argumentativeness irritated him almost past bearing; the woman, on the other hand, though the reverse of aggressive, was tiresome and chattering, and given to platitudes, as is only too frequently the case with middle-aged females.

He managed to seize an opportunity or two of going away privily to look up the Enscotts. There

he experienced a feeling of unmitigated relief; so undisguised was this, in fact, that one day Lauretta remarked mischievously:

"I don't believe you cotton to those relations of yours at all, Mr. Selmin."

"Relations? Well, they're more Jack Durward's relations than mine," he answered, "and precious distant at that."

She looked fixedly at him, shook her head, and laughed outright.

"Well, well. You must be nice to them," she answered.

"Well? Aren't I?"

"I don't know. You are of that type who would find it difficult to be nice to anybody if it didn't come natural, but no one could be more so if it did. But there, listen to me undertaking to lecture you," she broke off.

"Oh, but I like it," he answered. "And the second clause of the indictment draws the teeth of the first. I'm so glad, though, that that has been your experience."

"But, how do you know it has?"

"Haven't you just said so?"

She laughed again.

"You've got me there," she allowed,

She was moving about the room arranging flowers. Her soft, rich, dark beauty was enhanced by the glowing radiance of the warm summer air. Selmin, seated in a basket chair, watching her, took it all in. It was mid-forenoon, and he had managed to slip away on his bicycle, leaving Durward to fulfil his

share of the pact. Captain Enscott had walked into Steynhurst intent on having it out with the newspaper shop because his morning papers had not been delivered, and the two had the stage to themselves. Through the open windows the green line of the Downs cut the hazy blue of the summer sky, the dark crown of Canonbury Link bisected by the foreground of woods. Wasps were winging in and out, now settling on the flowers, now winnowing Selmin's ear in their flight. One had alighted on his left hand, and this he was lazily watching. But Lauretta wasn't.

"Take care. There's a wasp on your hand," she said.

"Yes. But he won't do any harm. They never do if you don't bother them. Positively, I like them. They're beautiful things."

"There! It's gone up your sleeve," she went on.

"Never mind. It'll soon come out again," he answered, without moving a muscle. But at the same time there was a shrill, though stifled, buzz. Selmin's face did move, but hardly perceptibly.

"It has stung you," cried Lauretta, staying her task.

"Yes. But I shan't die for that. It'll get out in a minute."

It did, crawling down his wrist and then winging its way rapidly to the open window.

"But, doesn't it hurt? You don't seem to mind?"

"No. I've got good blood for bites and stings—of course, I'm not counting snake bites. They

never have after effects on me. I suppose this poor beast got panic-stricken when he found himself up an unwonted dark tunnel with perhaps an unwonted pressure from the sleeve, and lashed out. Two-thirds of the 'attacks' by wild things are caused by panic, not vice."

"Well, let's see. You must have something put on it," she said, anxiously.

"Pooh, it's nothing. I've had mosquito bites that felt far worse."

He undid his cuff, and drew up his sleeve. On the outside of the brown, muscular forearm was a small puncture and corresponding swelling. Lauretta bent over it with concern in her eyes. Selmin laughed.

"Really it's nothing," he said. "We'll just touch it with a drop of this."

"This" was a whisky bottle, for after his bicycle ride on a hot summer morning he had just been enjoying a "peg."

"There could be no better remedy," he went on, as he dabbed a drop of the spirit on the puncture. "But, really, I don't feel it."

"Really?"

"Really. I shall forget in a minute that I was stung at all."

She still looked at him anxiously and a bit curiously. Somehow the incident brought back to her mind that of the escaped panther.

"Anyone would think you were immune from—from—things that other people are not," she went on. "That beast the other day in the wood, for instance?"

"Oh, that? Yes. But, you see it was a question

of magnetism, I think. Animals are absolutely infallible judges of how you feel towards them. Now I'll admit to you that at one stage of that experiment I was within an ace of being in the greatest scare I ever was in my life, but I just managed to choke it down. If I hadn't, it would have been all up with me. You see, I've shot these things, and it was like shooting, well, anything else. But when you go up to a beast like that, with no better weapon than your bare hands, why it's different. I'm not saying it to brag, mind, but as a matter of sheer zoological interest."

"No—no. Of course you're not," she answered. "I can't imagine *you* bragging. Still, the fact remains that it was wonderful—wonderful."

Her tone had taken on a dangerous softness. Indeed, as regarded both of them, here alone together, their tones had somehow and unconsciously left the normal. Selmin, sitting there, watching this girl; her every grace of movement, her face, her eyes; was conscious at any rate that the time of his life had come. Yet he would not hurry things. He had a shrewd idea he would obtain his desire, and all the more, for that very reason, he would not hurry things. And the divine summer air wafted in through the open window, and the glow of the sunlight outside, and the moving grace of the figure within, all made up the picture of peace in his mind and senses. There was no impulse about him. He was content to wait and enjoy; to make all he could, and that was everything, out of the hour and each stage of the hour.

So their voices took on the sympathetic tone, blending, as it were, one into the other, as they talked. If a third party had suddenly invaded, it would have been a bringing down to earth again ; but none did. Once or twice it occurred to Selmin, but in a far-off kind of way, that he was in duty bound to go back and attend to his guests ; but then he remembered his pact with Durward, and why should he be a slave to other people ? Of course he would not be. So he sat on there, making the most of the hour, and feeling thoroughly at peace with all the world. Then through the open door came a sort of hurricane rush.

It spelt two dogs, and they charged up to the pair impartially, with much tail wagging, and whining, and panting. But it meant that the morning *à deux* was over. Soon the captain followed.

"How are you, Selmin ?" he cried, mopping his forehead, and throwing his stick into the corner. "Devilish hot road that into Steynhurst. Well, and how are you ? I hope this child has been taking care of you. Ha, ha ! I see she has."

He threw down a bundle of newspapers he was carrying.

"I see that escaped beast has been netted at last," he went on. "They scooped it up in a wood outside Clancehurst way—Heath Hover, I think the name of the place was—Lord, but the travelling show will have a bill to pay, I should think. But there you are. The *Mail* has the whole yarn."

"I don't think it will have done much damage," answered Selmin. "A wolf or a jackal would have

done far more. But this beast is a cat, and will be far more likely to have stalked wild things. However, it gave me a strange experience."

"I should think so," said the other. "You'll stop and have a bite with us. It's about time for it, eh, Lauretta?"

"Ready directly," answered the girl. And Selmin accepted. Why not? Guests or no guests he was not going to make himself a slave to anybody, and Durward was there, after all.

But during lunch a shell was destined to fall. Captain Enscott began to talk of their departure as though it were a settled thing. This was news, and not palatable news, either. But Selmin showed no sign. He was revolving a plan.

"I didn't know you were thinking of leaving so soon," he said. "About when, did you say?"

Enscott named a time about a fortnight thence.

"So soon? Really?" he repeated. "But, are you really obliged to? because, if not, I was hoping you might be persuaded to come over and put in a little time at my place. It would be no end jolly if you could. What do you think, Miss Enscott? Certainly, there are those relatives of mine you say I don't like, but they may be gone by then."

Lauretta broke into a bright laugh.

"I'm very much afraid you hope they will," she said. "You are awfully kind, though, but I don't quite know what to say. What do you say, father?"

"Say? Why, that I agree with you, and I also agree with Selmin to the effect that it would be

no end jolly," replied the ex-mariner heartily. "So we'll consider it settled."

Selmin could hardly fight down the intense relief that had leaped into his face. That announcement of departure had hit him, as it were, between the eyes, and with a force that he had hardly been able to credit that it would; and yet he was marvellous as an adept at concealing his feelings.

"That's first-rate, captain," he answered. "So you must choose your own time, and all you've got to do is to let me know."

"Thanks. We'll take you at your word, Selmin. I'm an ancient sea-dog, and say outright what I mean. So there you are. Eh, child?"

Lauretta laughed.

"You say it is too much sometimes—and sometimes too loud," she added, drily.

"Well, well—I'm getting old, and this is a rum world, and very much given to——"

"Rum," put in Selmin, innocently.

"Ha-ha! Not bad," cried old Enscott. "No. What I meant was that it's very much given to annoying a man."

"But not a woman, old dad?" suggested Lauretta.

"Oh, you're taking a hand, are you? Well, that very production is one of its most common forms of annoyance."

"I see I'll have to drop out. I'm in the minority of one to two," returned the girl.

"Gracefully conceded," said Selmin; "but the basis fallacious. Where would we come in without you?"

Her eyes danced with fun.

"Gracefully put," she said, "if you mean it."

"Certainly. In proof whereof I'm going to make a rather bold suggestion—I mean, if Captain Enscott can spare you. How would it be to make the most of such a splendid day, and take that ride we were planning, over to Nuttery Cover? It's one of the loveliest little villages you ever saw, nestling in among woods, but I should think most abominably damp in winter."

"Oh, yes. I'll try and spare her, Selmin," answered the captain. "The fact is, I'm going to snatch a sight more than forty winks myself after that beastly hot walk this morning. So I'll be all right."

"Quite sure, dad? Well, I should like it immensely. Shall we take the dogs?"

Selmin looked dubious.

"I should like to. But the road's a bit narrow, and hilly, when you get past Plover Green, and then—motor-cars."

"Well, we won't."

"By the way," broke in Enscott, "I heard a couple of yokels in Steynhurst this morning spinning an extraordinary yarn. I turned into that inn at the corner—I forget its name—where the road branches off to Wesson, to wash out some of the confounded dust that an express engine of a motor-car had just made me swallow, and heard these chaps in the next department yarning about having found a dead horse in a chalk-pit up on the Downs with a saddle and bridle on. I couldn't quite follow

it, as they were talking the broadest of dialect. I couldn't ask them about it either, because there were two partitions in between. But it looks uncommonly as if there'd been an accident."

"Or it might have been a runaway horse without a rider," suggested Selmin tranquilly, not daring to look at his "accomplice." He had told her what had become of the horse, but had left out the exact locality of that particular chalk pit.

"Of course. But I wonder who the deuce it belonged to! And there was nothing about it in any of the papers."

"There might have been, but one misses these episodes sometimes," was the answer, equally tranquil.

"Yes, of course. But I must make some enquiries. It sounds interesting," went on the captain. "By the way, I should think you might come to uncommon grief in some of these chalk pits, eh, Selmin? Why, they're like precipices—and with a restive mount, too?"

"You might, but it never seems to happen," he said. Why the deuce did the other keep harping on that string, he was thinking. That expressed intention of making enquiries left an unpleasant impression. The incident had, of course, leaked out, and most rustics would give away any yarn of the kind for a pint. No. It was a nuisance, anyway.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OTHER HALF.

SELMIN was in the very zenith of delight, but such was his habit of restraint that no one would have guessed anything of the sort to look at him, as he sat there outside the front door in the shade of the sycamores, smoking a cigar and waiting for the appearance of Lauretta. She had gone up to put on a bicycle skirt, and from a window above came an even, well-regulated snore. The captain was having his forty winks.

The reason of Selmin's delight was complex. He had not reckoned on such a day as this, and it was only half done. He had thrown out the suggestion as to the other half of it with much inward misgiving. He had thought it possible the old man might have felt crusty at the idea of being left alone all that time, but no. Everything had fallen in without a hitch.

Decidedly things were looking up. They had promised to be his guests when their time here was up. That would mean that he would be in Lauretta's society all day and every day, and then——?

And then—came in an uncomfortable thought, and it spelt Durward. Yet, why? Durward had certainly been the direct agency which had saved her from being dashed to pulp in the chalk pit, but still—why should he mistrust Durward? Why? For the life of him he could not have told, but in this particular connection instinct took the place of reason. He only knew that through some mysterious reason he did. But Durward's compact to look after his other guests came to his mind. He would induce them to stay on. That would give him a freer hand, and——

"I hope I haven't been very long."

She was standing in the doorway pulling on gloves.

"No, no." And as he got up he thought what a picture she made, as it were, in a frame.

Strange to say both their bicycles were in good order, and ran easily, strange because, on the principle of a chain being no stronger than its weakest link, it almost invariably happens that when one machine is in good order the other is anxious to drop to pieces, or at best only puncture twice in three miles.

"Do you know," Selmin began, when they were under way, "I felt myself a record fraud when your father began upon that horse business. I do hope he won't manage to get at the ins and outs of it all."

"Oh, don't bother about that! I'll soon talk him over."

He looked at her strangely.

"I suppose you usually twist him round your little finger, as the ancient chestnut hath it?"

"I don't know. He can stiffen up pretty taut on occasions. He hasn't been skippering big ships all these years for nothing."

"But, with you?"

"Even with me. Still, as far as this affair goes, it'll be all right. Don't worry about it."

Selmin was reassured. There was a something quick and sympathetic about this girl that he had never met with before in any woman. Perhaps it was this which had gone so far towards constituting the magnetic "draw." She was always the same, he had noticed, no fits and starts and moods and tempers, such as all of them broke out in on occasions, and that fact alone appealed to him potently. She, for her part, was none the less reading him. She knew that he was powerfully drawn to her, knew that he was becoming more and more so every time they met; and yet he never allowed himself to get off his balance. Naturally he was not the first who had been so drawn, not by any means. But he was the first who had been able to keep himself so completely in hand; in fact, for want of a better word, to retain so completely his dignity under the circumstances. And this she admired.

"I'm afraid we've left the smooth behind, and must prepare for the rough," he said, as they topped the high railway arch, and turned sharp to the right on to the broad, tarred road, which constitutes the one street of Plover Green. "Beastly switchbacky, narrow road, and puncturous gravel directly."

"Never mind, I'm enjoying this. I never get a chance of a long ride, and the surroundings are lovely. How well Gateminster Monastery stands out," as they went along the more difficult way he had predicted.

"Yes. I didn't like it at first, but now I've rather got to, if only they'd eliminate that clock in the steeple. It's a fine landmark and you can't get away from it for miles. Hallo! Why, here comes a gang of its inmates."

A turn of the road brought into view a number of the white-clad Carthusians. Some were bearded, some were shaved, but all were talking volubly, also gesticulating, and mostly in French. All wore large heavy black boots. On this Lauretta remarked.

"It doesn't seem in keeping," she said. "They ought to wear sandals."

"Yes, but think of the climate and the roads. Well, you've seen some of them outside at any rate, and you couldn't in. No 'skirt' admitted under any circs. whatever. They send them out for a walk once a week, you know, so this must be their day."

The party drew aside to let the cyclists pass, for the road was narrow there, but glanced at them with scant interest.

"Also they mayn't talk except on these occasions," went on Selmin. "So now they're making up for it."

"They certainly are that," laughed Lauretta, as the voluble French faded round the next bend. "I say, but what if they had been taking their walk

abroad through the wood where the panther was? Eh?"

"Query—would he have survived the shock? At any rate, he'd have got the scare of his life."

"Or they!"

"Both parties, I shouldn't wonder," answered Selmin. "By the way, these white chaps, ghosting along the road often scare horses."

"Then they are 'ghostly' in a double sense."

"Not bad," he returned, and they both laughed. Why not? It was an afternoon for talking light-hearted nonsense; but presently the state of the road made it anything but light-hearted wheeling. It became a case of pushing the machines up some short, but very steep hills. But the overhanging masses of foliage met over the road, shutting off the sun rays, so it didn't matter, and the light-hearted nonsense ran on unchecked.

"Now," said Selmin at last, when they had covered a few more miles. "We'll walk this bit. Running down a steep hill with brakes hard on we can't appreciate one of the most lovely glimpses in my experience of as much of the world as I know."

The road took a steep and sudden dip. Below, through the foreground framing of meeting boughs, rose a tapering steeple. Roofs, too, but not many. Down the road, edged with green oak wood and fern brake, then a sweep of further woods, upwards on all sides. The little village straggled along on either side of the way.

"You were right about this," pronounced Lauretta. "It really is a picture of sweet loveliness."

"But precious damp in winter," he put in, with a comical twinkle.

"Don't. You're spoiling it all. Who wants to think of winter now?"

They stacked their bicycles against the lych gate and went along the churchyard path between the two lines of solemn yews, which seemed to make an appropriate cloister. But the rest of this "God's Acre" was shadowed with trees, and rendered radiant by blossoming rose bushes. Swifts wheeled in black, crescent shapes against the blue of the sky, and swallows were hawking infinitesimal insect life nearer the ground. But the scene was one of beauty and rest and peace.

"Do you want to look inside?" said Selmin. "Last time I was here—with some other people—there was a beast of a bull-dog chained to the porch and it missed my leg by half-an-inch snap. Then a dear, good lady came out and asked us not to disturb the service. I thought it a precious queer way of getting people to attend service to anchor a business-like bull-dog across the church porch; anyway, we didn't dream of disturbing that service. And the best of the joke was, that the village policeman told me, afterwards, that the said bull-dog belonged to the parson."

"No, really?"

"Fact. Well, he isn't here now, at any rate, so we can go in, if you like. To me one country church inside is much the same as another; same old stone effigy in the corner with a worn-away nose, and a more worn-away cur lying at its worn-away toes;

same bedizened little toilet table, with its spindle-shanked cross and brace of attenuated dips; but some people rave about it all. Also same old mouldy, tombstony whiff."

Lauretta laughed.

"I'm afraid you'd be voted a shocking Goth, by those who knew all about that sort of thing."

"Or by those who thought they did. Well, shall we adjourn to the 'Roan Mare' in search of liquid, and other refreshment, hot or cold, as the case may be?"

"Yes, let's."

They got on their bicycles, but the distance was only a step. The quaint little inn was in the middle of the village road. It was one of those few surviving ones with low-ceiled, panelled rooms, and odd, old-fashioned utensils disposed around. Over the same Lauretta began to wax enthusiastic. Even the "bar" was constituted by a sideboard and shelves in one of these. The landlord, an exceedingly civil countryman, who knew Selmin, came forward and attended to their wants as promptly as possible.

"By Jove, but this goes down well," said the latter, getting his nose out of a long and sparkling tumbler. "And we've walked nearly half the way, too."

"Well, it hasn't hurt us," answered the girl. "And—I am enjoying this. It was no end of a good move on your part to suggest it."

"Ah, I quite agree. Well, there's your department"—as a tray was deposited in front of her. "What a pity your father doesn't ride a bike. You miss such a lot in the country if you don't."

"Yes. He tried once and came rather a bad spill. He said he was too old for any more of that sort of thing, poor dear old chap, and I think he was right."

"Perhaps. But they are awfully convenient things. Hallo, what's that? Looks like an invasion. Bother! I hope Stone'll have the sense to put them in another room."

For the sound of a trap just drawing up had come to his ears. He rose and went to the window, which rather looked down on to the village street; and then gave a whistle expressive of annoyance and disgust. For the trap was his own waggonette, and it contained no less a trio than the Filgays and Durward. What a rotten coincidence! he thought. For he did not want them there in the least. However, there they were, so it was a case of making the best of it. But of all places in the whole countryside that they should have elected to drive out to that afternoon, that Nuttery Cover should have been chosen. But the way of making the best of it was to go out and meet them; and this he did.

"Well, well. Of all the coincidences," he said. "Miss Enscott and I cycled over, and are in the middle of tea. Come along in. This is a very quaint old pub, almost a show place. Oh, never mind about the trap! It's all right with George."

He did not fail to catch the significant gleam that lit up Muriel's face as they went in together, chatting easily; but they utterly failed to read in his that he was voting their arrival a most infernal nuisance. Durward knew he was; still, the whole thing was sheer accident, sheer coincidence, and there was no

help for it. Well, at any rate they would have the run home together, thought Selmin. Perhaps by some process of telepathy Muriel Filgay thought they would not.

Then there was a lot of talk and greeting, and fresh tea was ordered in.

"What a delightful little old room, Mr. Selmin," began Mrs. Filgay, looking out of the window, by way of appreciating the quaintness of the room, "and what a strange thing that Jack should have suggested bringing us here."

"Yes. But I don't think he could have brought you to more of a 'beauty spot,' do you?"

"Oh, no. It's just lovely. We shall be quite spoiled for Mimosa Road again after all this," she ended, with a sigh. It appealed to Selmin. He could quite enter into that sort of feeling.

"But why think of Mimosa Road now?" he said, and his voice was sympathetic. "You needn't go back there yet awhile, surely."

He was rewarded by the look of genuine relief that came into the other's face. Poor woman! The rest and peaceful beauty of Selmingfold, and its surroundings, had grown upon her, and made her departure a thing to be looked forward to with the reverse of contentment. The clearance upon it now was too palpable.

"But, Mr. Selmin, we've really bored you long enough. It was awfully good of you to——"

"Now—now—now," he interrupted pleasantly. "Why put it that way? We've been jolly enough together, and the word 'boring' doesn't come in."

Here Lauretta, keeping an ear open for two conversations, smiled a smile to herself, but it might have been at a remark which Durward was making. Mabel Filgay's face cleared still more. She decided that she liked Selmin almost more than Jack Durward, and that wasn't much.

So they all talked on together and were jolly enough. Then Muriel suddenly declared she must cross over to the post office opposite and send a wire. She would be back directly.

This ensured that no one offered to do it for her, or to accompany her. She crossed over, and did send a wire, but—it was a bogus one. Then she returned.

The two bicycles belonging to Selmin and Lauretta were standing against the wall outside, not exactly under the window, but just to the left of it. Through the window came the voices and laughter of those within. She stood for a moment over the machines, examining first one, then the other, and bent over one of them. Then she re-entered.

More laughter, more talk, then the droop of the sun behind the great oak wood, warned that it was time to move.

"My back wheel is flat," exclaimed Lauretta, when they were outside.

"Is it? Why not come in the wagonette with us?" said Muriel, quickly. "We could stack the bike on the box, couldn't we, Dr. Durward?"

"No necessity," rejoined Selmin tranquilly. "Punctures are easily mended."

"Of course. We came together, and I couldn't think of letting Mr. Selmin ride back alone."

Muriel Filgay had greenish eyes, and now they looked greener as she caught those of Selmin. Her face took on an additional colour; from the expression of his she gathered that somehow or other he must have managed to see her inflict those three pin stabs in the back tyre.

As a matter of fact he had, and that through the boundless and uncanny possibilities of a mere looking-glass.

CHAPTER XVII.

AND THE CLOSE——

MURIEL FILGAY was a fair—a very fair—representative of the class of female who ought to have been drowned, like a mongrel puppy, at its birth. She was eminently unfitted to make life the happier for anybody, not even for herself. The present and primary object of her hatred was Selmin, and next to him Lauretta.

She had not made so light of her mother's suggestion as to her "chances" with regard to the first, as she had pretended. She had thought the thing over, and had prepared to school herself into acting a part. Once the object attained, it wouldn't matter. But here, on arrival upon the scene, she had found the ground already in full occupation. She recognised that, beside Lauretta Enscott, she was like a candle in a full noonday sun. Wherefore she hated them both.

She was under no delusion in the matter. She knew perfectly well by now that were there no Lauretta Enscott in the world, her "chances" as to

Selmin would be non-existent. Her own instinct had told her that. Wherefore she hated him first.

The bicycle incident at Nuttery Cover had been actuated by sheer feminine venom : to arrange that the two should not have the homeward ride together. She had reckoned that the girl would not think it worth while bothering over staying till the puncture was mended. But she had reckoned without Selmin, without both of them, in fact. So when the punctures had been deftly mended by a casual workman who had dropped in, and was rewarded with a quart for his pains, and the two glided by the waggonette on the free wheel, about half-way home, she grew more venomous still, nor could she altogether disguise that development.

"I must say I think it's rather queer form on Mr. Selmin's part to leave his guests alone for a whole day while he goes gallivanting off with someone else," she said, as with a cheery wave of the hand the pair disappeared round a bend in front.

"Muriel, dear," expostulated her mother piteously; she was feeling particularly warm and appreciative towards their host on the strength of that renewed invite—and then, what if Durward were to repeat the remark ?

"Well, I do think so," went on the girl, defiantly.

Durward said nothing. His face was like a wooden mask. Truth to tell, he was not altogether brimming over with cordiality himself towards Selmin, who was holding him very literally to his side of the pact. He was getting more than a little tired of Mabel Filgay, and, as for that detestable girl, he

would gladly have ordered her severe corporal punishment. And now had he not just heard Selmin urging them to prolong their stay indefinitely.

But there was worse than this behind. From the moment when he had lowered Lauretta Enscott from the back of the runaway horse, it seemed that a spark had been put to dry tinder which now smouldered and glowed. Was Selmin to have everything? was the question which he put to himself, with a growing frequency which was by no means good for his own peace of mind. More than once, too, he wondered how he would have acted had it been his relative's horse that was rushing to the chalk pit brink. Would he have acted differently, or not acted at all, and would he now be Durward of Selmingfold? From that moment, too, he had been thinking a great deal about Lauretta Enscott, and observing her, and the more he observed her the more he found himself thinking about her when she was not there. And Selmin was to have everything —everything!

Meanwhile the said Selmin and his companion were careering down the last steep hill which should land them at right angles on the road leading to East Welstead station.

"Take care, take care," he warned. "It's an awfully dangerous corner. Jam on the brakes. There's a car coming."

She obeyed—just in time. A large car dashed by at racing speed. Had her brakes been defective she would have been catapulted, a mangled heap, fifty yards into the adjoining field.

"Damned road-hog!" murmured Selmin to himself. Lauretta burst out laughing.

"Quite right," she said. "It was. By the way, it's early yet. Can't we do a round?"

"Certainly. We can go through Coltfield, past the monastery, and take the turning to the right opposite Germanbury post office to Plover Green."

"Let's. That'll be delightful. What a relief this tarred road is, too."

On their left lay an expanse of wood and field, on their right a far greater one, undulating up to the green, bare roundness of the Downs; and between Gateminster Monastery, with its tapering tall spire darting aloft to the blue, and its crowd of buildings, made an effective foreground. There was a whiff of late garnered hay in the air—the sweetest, most fragrant of all scents. But the whole of their way was one long unbroken vision of summer delight, the gold of the westering sun touching everything with a peace and glory.

They ran through Coltfield, with its massive church and square tower, and turned off at the cross roads. The sun was declining now, and a red glow had taken the place of the dazzling gold.

"Look! There's our wood, where the escaped kitten was," said Selmin, pointing to the left.

"Why, so it is! I've got no great bump of locality, by the way. But I suppose if you've been in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, you soon acquire it."

"You have to."

"I expect you'll soon be going back to some of

those same out-of-the-way places," Lauretta went on. "They say that that sort of thing never gets out of the blood. What do you think? Is it true?"

"There's a lot in it, but the rule isn't universal. It all depends on the conditions of life, and how things run at this end of the world."

"Well, now—take yourself. Do you ever feel the call of the other life—by the way, that has a sort of a pious smack, hasn't it?" She broke off into a laugh. "I should have said, 'the call of the wild.'"

"I haven't yet," he answered, "but perhaps I haven't had time. Still, in these days of quick and easy transport one can always combine the two. I had a relative—he's dead now, quite lately, poor old chap—who used to draw a contrast between ancient and modern. Ancient—the 'seeing-off' and the going-off people on an outward-bound liner. Then it was all red noses and a soppy handkerchief and general snivelling, as the boat sheered from the quay. The departing party was reckoned as sort of going to potential doom, you see. Maybe for years, but much more likely to be for ever, kind of business. Now, it's all grin and hoorooshing. 'Back in time for the pheasants, old sport'—and so on. That's the modern. But your father must have seen all that in his time."

"Yes, but he never drew that particular comparison."

"Do you think he ever feels a longing to be at sea again?"

"No—no. Not at present, anyhow. When it's blowing great guns, and volleying torrents of rain

against the windows, he literally hugs himself in the snugness of being where he is. If he were alone, it might be different."

Selmin looked at her furtively. He was thinking his own thoughts. "If he were alone," she had said. Well, as far as his own scheme went that need not of necessity constitute a drawback. The very words might afford him a clue, but he judged the time was not opportune; possibly not ripe, certainly not opportune, especially under the circumstances that both were progressing by that capricious method of locomotion, the bicycle, to wit. But they chatted on, in an easy, frank, confidential way, as they sped along through the twilight: all too quickly thought, at any rate, one of them, as they wheeled up to the row of sycamores which guarded the front door of Chirol's Farm.

"Oh, we have had such a lovely ride, old father," cried Lauretta, as the captain came out to meet them. "Nuttery Cover is the sweetest little place I've ever seen, lying in the middle of those sweeping woods."

"So you've enjoyed it, child? That's right—that's right. Nothing like doing that when you can, eh, Selmin? Well, I can't ride bicycles; I'm too old to learn. I did try once, and came a most unholy spill. Never again, never again!"

"I shall be delighted to drive you over there, captain, any day you like," said Selmin. "Or anywhere else you like, for that matter."

"Thanks, thanks. Awfully good of you. Perhaps I'll take you at your word some day."

"Well, all you've got to do is to let me know. Hallo! What have these two rascals been up to?" as the two dogs came charging out of the front door, and were ramming their noses into his hand, and wriggling and squirming and tail wagging.

"I took them out this afternoon," said Enscott, "up to Laylock Pond, but I took devilish good care they didn't rush the coverts. By the way, I met old Dayson, and the expression of his face was enough to turn the pond to vinegar. Even a pipe of ship's Perique and the price of a pint hardly melted it."

"Was he uncivil?" asked Selmin, quickly.

"No—no. Only sour. These old rustics once they turn sour never lose their acidity."

"By the way, captain, you don't seem so keen on trying your hand at the perch," said Selmin. "Pierce tells me that since that day we had together, you've only been out once."

"Oh, well it's very good of you, Selmin; but—er—well, you know what I mean."

"I do—but I don't agree with it. Look here," putting a genial hand on the other's arm. "If you set up any diffident scruples of that kind, I shall feel hurt—really hurt. Aren't I right, Miss Enscott?"

"Now, which side ought I to take?" answered the girl, looking from one to the other, with a very bewitching smile.

"Mine, this time," said Selmin unhesitatingly. "But apart from that, we must get up another picnic like before," and then his face clouded. He was thinking of those other people, Muriel Filgay, with

her objectionable, aggressive manner and speech, and her mother, who was apt to wax "crockish," and therefore a bore, and—Durward! That other day, just the three of them alone together, that was a day to remember; but these discordant elements—! Now he began to regret having pressed them to prolong their stay. He regretted it all the more, perhaps, when the captain suggested it was a mistake to stand talking on the steps when they might be making themselves snug and jolly indoors, with something after their respective ride and walk.

"Sorry, but must go," he answered, looking at his watch. "I shall be late as it is, and when you've got people—— So, good-bye."

"Thanks so much for the delightful afternoon I've had," Lauretta said, as she came with him down the steps to where his bicycle stood against one of the sycamores.

"Ditto—for the delightful afternoon *we've* had," he corrected, clicking to the glass of his lamp which he had just lighted. "Good-bye."

Did their hands linger ever such a trifle in each other's clasp? Selmin could have sworn they did, and it set his pulses bounding. Their eyes were meeting full in the dusking starlight, and the rich, beautiful face was stamping itself into the retina of his brain in that brief moment. Then he went.

Owls were hooting above the oak woods on either side of his road, and the black loom of the Downs cut the stars on his left. Still that face was with him as he sped along, the soft glow of those luminous eyes looking into his, and, he thought he could read

in them a message, an answer. He had said that he hated being alone. Now he positively enjoyed it, and what jarred was the thought that he should be among these people again, and have to listen to and take part in their chatter. It was all very well to have made that compact with Durward to take them off his hands; but, after all, in his own house, he could not treat them as if they were not there. Well, after all, these were mere temporary inconveniences. He had every reason to take an intense joy in living—remembering the circumstances. He had every reason to suppose that the culminating crown which he so ardently desired would be his, remembering that last glance.

A big motor-car, its head lamps setting up a dazzling wall of light, swung round a bend of the road, and rushed past, raising a cloud of dust and shaving him by three inches, but he forgot to feel annoyed. Again he was alone in the stillness and the starlight, with the departed radiance of the day around his heart, and he could have sung aloud in his joy of certainty.

In the sequel he arrived at Selmingfold disgracefully late for dinner; but that is a detail.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COMING OF THE SHADOW.

"ANYONE for church this morning?" asked Selmin, as they sat at the breakfast table. "I wonder if we shall all tread on our own heels to answer 'Yes,'" he added comically.

Some weeks had gone by, and they were well into August now. The Enscotts, who had prolonged their stay at Chirol's, were now at Selmingfold on their promised visit. As a matter of cause and effect, the owner of that manor was in a state of blissful peace with all the world, even with the Filgays—*mère et fille*—whom, as a matter of hard fact, he could very well have done without. Durward was away. This was a lovely, peaceful, English summer Sunday morning, for which redundancy of adjectives no excuse shall be made here. He let go a burst of laughter.

"There's a singular lack of enthusiasm on the subject," he said, breaking the pause, during which everyone seemed to be furtively watching someone else for an answer.

"Well, the fact is, I should like to go," said Lauretta. "But won't it be giving a lot of trouble?"

For answer Selmin smiled and shook his head.

"Mrs. Filgay? Captain—are you on?" he said.

But the first pleaded dubiously that it was rather hot, the second that he wasn't much on.

"The fact is, Selmin," he said, "I can't stand these confounded twaddling long sermons. The effect they have on me is sheer irritation. An insult to one's intelligence for one thing, and a most infernal bore for another. Why, everything that there is to be said on the subject has been said over and over again all one's life, and said very badly, too. No; you can count me out. If it wasn't for the sermonising, I'd go to church much oftener. As it is, I hardly ever do. But—I hope you don't mind?"

"Good Lord, no. This is Liberty Hall. Besides, as a matter of fact, I very much agree with you. Rather."

"I'd like to go," said Muriel. "These country congregations are rather another side of life—afford a sort of character study, don't you know?"

"Very well. The question is, which shall it be? There's Arlington, Warnington, Wesson, or East Welstead, all within easy reach."

"Which do you recommend?" asked Muriel.

Selmin hid a smile behind his hand.

"None," he answered, with a stifled splutter.

"I've got a suggestion," said Lauretta, "but—I don't know how you'll like it. Let's go to that Roman Catholic church at East Welstead, the one at

the corner of the three cross roads. It looks rather nice from outside."

"Certainly—as far as I'm concerned. What do you say, Miss Filgay?"

"Not a bad idea. It'll make a change, anyhow," answered that girl.

"You don't mind, do you, Mr. Selmin?" said Lauretta.

"Mind? Why on earth should I mind? Oh, I see! The 'scarlet' business, and all that. Not much. I suppose in these days bigotry is pretty well dead and buried, among ourselves, at any rate. What's the saying?—'All roads lead to—Earl's Court'?"

There was a laugh, and then a discussion as to the method of transport. Lauretta suggested the bicycle, and—accordingly that was decided on.

"Sure you won't find it too hot?" urged Selmin.

"No. On a lovely morning like this it's the very thing, and then one feels so much more independent."

Selmin looked at her, and was thinking. Here considerateness bulked large. She was purposely avoiding entailing extra work on his household this splendid Sunday morning. This he realised, and appreciated. And considerateness—not quite the same thing as consideration, somehow—among her sex, was so scarce.

The church was prettily situated at the corner of the cross-roads, and the graveyard in front of the porch was bright with flowers. Quite a number of people were stacking their bicycles outside and within the porch; and as the three entered, they

noticed that the building was quite a large one, with lofty nave and chancel. About a couple of hundred boys in blue jerseys, and with brown faces, and bare legs and feet, occupied the two aisles and part of the nave. Selmin found his way instinctively to an empty pew opposite the pulpit. A group of Dominican Sisters, in black and white habits, occupied the front seats on the other side, and on the left of the chancel was a large pictured Madonna with lights and pots of flowers in front of it. But it struck him that the chancel and high altar—another large Madonna in a niche above this—looked lofty and dignified, and there was no paper-flower tawdriness such as he had seen elsewhere in the course of his wanderings. Then the surpliced choir—quite a long one—and the priest entered, and the service began, It was well rendered, simply, and without straining after flying too high; Selmin had an artistic mind and could appreciate this, so, too, could Lauretta. But to Muriel Filgay it was sheer Mumbo Jumbo.

The Gospel ended, the priest put off his outer vestments, and went into the pulpit. After giving out notices, he proceeded to a few remarks on matters of topical interest, often denunciatory, but humorous. More than once an audible ripple ran through the whole congregation.

"Yes, you may smile," he would interpolate, and obviously entering into the humour of the thing. "But it's true all the same." And then he came down to the more serious matter in hand, and Selmin listening, came to the conclusion that

to Captain Enscott's dictum an hour or so back, was here something of an exception.

The sermon ended, and eventually so did the Mass, and they were outside in the glowing summer air again.

"There's a man who can talk sense," said Selmin, as they spun over the smooth tarred road homeward bound. "I believe I'll go and hear him again some time."

"You'll be turning Roman Catholic next, I suppose," remarked Muriel, who had been bored by the whole proceeding, and was feeling short tempered. But to this he answered nothing.

"It's an interesting place, though," said Lauretta. "Those small boys in the blue jerseys all looked remarkably brown and sturdy."

"Yes. They belong to the orphanage attached," rejoined Selmin, "and I think their looks are the best advertisement of the institution. Well, did you think it was worth while coming over?"

"Very much so," said Lauretta. "I enjoyed it."

He looked at her as they skimmed along, side by side. Her dark, rich colouring, brought out by the warm, sensuous August day, seemed to fit in so thoroughly with the warm, sensuous August landscape. The harvest had begun, and in some fields the corn, already reaped, was standing in shocks, while in others, unreaped, it formed a billowy golden plain; and far and near, masses of velvety foliage rolled away to lose themselves in dim blue haze.

"What a dream! What a dream!" Lauretta was saying to herself as she gazed around. And perhaps

she may have been thinking other thoughts, for she had grown suddenly silent and pensive. The while Selmin was talking to the other girl, but for all that, some of the subtle and telepathic force may have communicated itself to him, too. Yes, the joy of living was more and more full upon him. Soon it would be more so. But, why did he not at once secure that "more so"?

Well, the fact was, he was constitutionally cautious, deliberate. He wanted to make sure, and, at present, he was not quite; only sufficiently verging that way to render everything rose-coloured. There was nothing impulsive about Selmin.

"Well, you energetic people," began Mabel Filgay, as they met at lunch—it was an ideal lunch, too, on an August day—cool meats, cool salads, cool fruits, cool drinks, cool everything. Outside, the shimmer of heat upon garden, and meadow, and wood, served to emphasise the coolness within. "Did you find an adequate reward for your energy? Captain Enscott and I have been energising under the big horse-chestnut all the morning."

"Yes, and so have the midges," cut in that mariner. "Still, they're a joke to the extra-England mosquito."

"Rather. Law of compensation everywhere," said Selmin. "We're not intended to be too happy here below."

"Hallo! Was that part of the text?" rejoined Enscott, with a laugh. "Sounds rather like it, you know."

"So it does. But, as in the classic rhyme, 'no, but it's true.'"

Then they both laughed, and of course the feminine element wanted to know where the joke came in. But naturally neither told them, notwithstanding which they were all very jolly and talkative, all but one, and that, Muriel. She had no reason to be pleased with the situation. For, although at first, she had recognised she would have stood no chance, apart from the existence upon the scene of Lauretta Enscott, subsequent study of her host had led her to think that by playing her cards well she might have.

It was afternoon and the whole party were doing an after-tea walk. But the day had clouded, and here in the woods, down by Laylock Pond, it was almost gloomy.

"I hardly know it like this," Lauretta was saying. "It seems associated with sunshine and light, you know, the sun networking through the leaves—where it could get through at all, that is. And I've never been here in dull weather."

"No. Woods are doubly gloomy then," Selmin answered.

"Let's go on and look at 'Excalibur,'" said the girl.

"All right. Not tiring you, Mrs. Filgay?" turning, for the other three were just behind.

"No—no. But how dark and cold it has suddenly become," with a little shiver. "Makes one feel almost as if something was going to happen."

"It's only sea-wrack, coming up over the Downs.

And something *is* going to happen. It's going to rain, but not yet awhile."

They were strolling along the edge of the big pond, towards its thin end, and Captain Enscott was expatiating on the most efficacious method of getting out perch. Imperceptibly Selmin and his companion were drawing ahead of the rest.

"Ah, here's 'Excalibur,'" said the latter, as they reached the circular pool, with its fringe of green rushes. Swallows were dipping low on the surface, and a dragon-fly or two flitted among the blades. "Now, to-day, it does look uncanny. But—what was that?"

She had stopped and was listening intently. A sound came out of the thickest part of the wood; a sort of long-drawn piteous mewing, and there was fear and agony in it. Selmin's face flushed. Paying no heed to his companion, he strode quickly in the direction of the sound. But she had followed him.

Under a nut-bush a little fluffy, tabby-and-white, half-grown kitten crouched, one of its forepaws held fast in the jaws of an iron trap. At sight of him it mewed more agonisingly than ever, and—spat. In a second Selmin, holding it gently but firmly, set his foot on the spring and released it. But even as he took hold of it, it seized his forefinger and nearly made the needle-like little teeth meet. Even then he did not leave go of it.

"Poor little beast!" he ejaculated, his voice shaking with mingled rage and pity. "I won't have any of these damned infernal instruments of torture

on the place—by God!" Then, becoming alive to Lauretta's presence, "I'm sorry, but I was—well, carried away. You must excuse me."

"There's nothing to excuse," she answered promptly, coming to his side, and examining the kitten. "You're quite right. What a sweet little pussie, too! Do you think it will live?"

"Oh, yes! I'm going to do all I can to make it anyhow."

He was holding it on his arm, and gently stroking it. It made no further attempt to bite now. It recognised with the unerring instinct of animals,—now that it was free from immediate agony—that it was being loved and cared for. If Lauretta had looked upon him with a certain modicum of admiration before, that was absolutely complete and unqualified now.

"But, it has bitten you badly," she said, with some anxiety.

"Yes, of course. I suppose I was a fool to touch it at all, but somehow I couldn't help it, poor little beast, and God knows how long it may have been there in agony. You know, any trapped animal goes half mad. Your own dog will snap at you under the circumstances even. But I daresay this won't matter."

His finger was streaming with blood. Before he knew what she was doing, Lauretta had got out her filmy toy of a handkerchief and was staunching it.

"Reminds one of the perch fin," he said, with a laugh; "only this doesn't hurt, and that did."

"What's the row?" cried a high-pitched voice behind them. "What a jolly little kitten!"

"Better not touch it, Miss Filgay. It might bite again."

"Oh, I see! The little horror! Better throw it into the pond and make an end of it," said Muriel.

Selmin did not answer her in words, but his face did. The look of disgust, of aversion, which came into it was patent to all, for the others had come up, too.

"Hallo; Selmin! you've got a nasty bite there." sung out Enscott. "Better have something done to it, hadn't you; cauterised or something of that sort?"

"No. This poor little beast is much too young to have anything the matter with it. Captain, do you mind pulling up that trap for me? It's the first thing I'm going to throw into the pond," with a look at Muriel.

"I never heard such an idiotic fuss made over a common or garden cat," said the latter, in an undertone to her mother, as they took their way back.

As they passed the "Excalibur" Pond, Selmin hurled the trap out into the middle of the water. Muriel Filgay looked on sneeringly, but Lauretta insisted on taking the wounded kitten into her own charge.

"We'll bring it round all right," she said.

"Yes, I think we can," said Selmin. "I'll get the vet. out from Steynhurst first thing to-morrow."

That evening, Dayson, the head-keeper at Selmingfold for many years, had his well-earned Sunday rest rudely broken into, and that by his master.

"Dayson, go out immediately with Pierce, and take up every one of those damned iron traps you've set."

The keeper stared, then got sulky.

"Won't first thing in the marnin' do, sur?" he said.

"No. Now, to-night. It may make a whole night's difference of damnable torture to some unfortunate beast. D'you hear? Start right along."

"I'll do as I'm told, Mus Selmin, sur, of course. But what about the varmin? How be I goin' to keep they daown, and keep up a head of birds. Tell me that."

"Damn the vermin, and ditto the birds." And then Selmin, to the stark, unbounded amazement of his underling, launched out into such a terrific flow of absolutely original and unprintable talk that that worthy was, as he afterwards put it in the taproom of the "Swan," "fairly knocked." But the recollection of the tortured kitten was still strong.

"So start along at once," he continued, "and remember, if I find one of those infernal machines on the place after this—why—there'll be a brace of vacancies right there and then."

CHAPTER XIX.

"SUMMER HAS STOPPED."

THE days that followed constituted one long idyll to Selmin. There were times when he could hardly believe that life could contain such thorough and complete happiness, the more so, that he had reason to believe his feelings were returned. Days of delight, spent in the glorious outdoor summer weather, among the loveliest of English scenes, long expeditions, here, there, everywhere, and absolutely no restriction of any sort or kind whatever. There were times when he wondered if it was all real.

Why then, did he not declare his said feelings? Well, he had come to the decision that it was time to do so, and he would make all opportunity during a certain moonlight picnic which we heard them planning. Now that event had been fixed for a couple of nights hence.

The presence of the other inmates had in no wise tended to spoil things either. Selmin would never indulge in the "two's company, three's none" type

of philosophy—or, rather, the want of it. He was content to take things as they came, and, perhaps, a consciousness that he was standing on firm ground may have enhanced this.

Yes. It was hard to believe it all reality. Time after time he would look round upon this fairest fragment of God's fair earth which *he* owned, and think how this girl, who had entirely stolen his heart and his being, would share it with him. He had attained an ideal state, and the consciousness now and again almost frightened him.

The Filgays were still at Selmingfold; for he had again invited them to extend their visit. Poor Mabel was quite overwhelmed. It was so extraordinarily kind of him, she said, to care to be bothered with them all that time. But Selmin had by now got to the bottom of how they were circumstanced. They had nowhere else to go, and to his idea a return to town in this glorious summer golden weather represented a sort of Paradise Lost. And his own feeling of happiness was so complete, his joy of life, that if he could be instrumental in imparting a share of it to other people, he was only too pleased to do it. He disliked the girl, with her high-nosed, high-voiced habit of laying down the law to her elders, no matter what the subject of conversation; but the mother was a well-meaning, amiable sort of creature, who never did or said anything to rub him the wrong way. And he knew that she appreciated every day she was at Selmingfold. So to her last suggestion of departure he had replied—

"Why should you? You're not in any necessi-

tated hurry to get back into that beastly town again at this time of year? There's plenty of room here, and I don't believe you're sick of it. Why not hold on a bit longer?"

There was a certain bluff cordiality in the speech; moreover, its hearer knew that Selmin would never say a thing he didn't mean. He might refrain from saying it, but in that case his silence would speak for itself.

"Sick of it!" Mabel had answered. "Why, I don't believe I've ever enjoyed anything so much in my life. We shall be delighted to make it another few days, then—that is, if you're quite sure——" she broke off hesitatingly.

"Why, of course, I'm quite sure," was the hearty reply. "I never make a statement unless I am. You know, really," half changing the subject, "I've got a prejudiced opinion, maybe; but it is that this is *the* one corner of God's green globe that is the nearest to what is supposed to be His heaven can be like. Well, I am only too glad for others to share some of its delight."

Mabel Filgay looked at him, puzzled. There was almost a fanaticism in his intense love of his beautiful home and its surroundings, but its genuineness there was no mistaking.

"Well, *you* deserve to own it, at any rate, if ever anyone could," she answered. And Durward, passing the open door, caught the remark, and remembered that the speaker had made exactly the same one to him on the afternoon of his first visit to Mimosa Road. That was nothing as concerned the said

speaker, but it happened that Durward had been in a strange mood of late, and a trifle like this would jar.

He had been at Selmingfold most of the time, except for absences of two or three days, and during that time had been powerfully attracted by Lauretta Enscott: indeed, more so, as he owned to himself, than he had ever been attracted by any girl or woman in his life. Yet he had been strong enough to conceal all trace of it. It was there, none the less, and growing, intensifying, with every day of intercourse beneath the same roof. The lurid, blood-to-the-brain mood which had been upon him when we first saw the two men together on the brow of the chalk pit, and subsequently on the occasion of the episode of the poisoned arrows, had, of late, become almost chronic. Was Selmin to have everything? was the refrain it took. *He* had saved the girl's life, not Selmin. But for him, Durward, and his promptitude, she would have been pitched, a shattered mass, to the base of the height. But it was for Selmin he had saved her. Selmin *was* to have everything.

Then Durward took a resolution—to be strictly accurate, we should say, *tried* to take a resolution. He would leave Selmingfold, and come there no more. It would not be safe; safe for either of them. And yet—and yet. Why should he? No, he would just wait and observe, and see how things shaped themselves.

Towards Durward, however, Lauretta was very sweet and gracious indeed. She had prettily acknowledged what he had done for her, and she would enjoy

a talk with him, to all outward appearance, quite as much as with Selmin. But to Durward it was not the same. By this or that symptom he *knew*. Still, he read sufficient to justify him, as he thought, in not carrying out that resolution just yet. There was one thing about Selmin that was rather uncommon under the circumstances. He never, in the slightest degree, tried to monopolise. Was it that *he* knew?

"We haven't got marching orders yet, dear," said Mabel Filgay, going into her daughter's room after the talk above chronicled. "Selmin is a perfect dear. He said we were not to think of running away, and it was a relief, I own. After this heavenly country, Mimosa Road, at this time of year, would be too awful."

"Yes, it would. I say, mother, why don't you try and hook Selmin, instead of setting your cap at that surly old crank, Jack Durward? He'd make a much better parent of the staircase, and he must be nearly the same age."

"Good heavens, child, will you stop?" with a scared look towards the door. "Talking nonsense is all very well as long as nobody hears it."

"But I'm talking sound sense," Muriel answered, with one of her high-pitched laughs. "I'll promise to treat him very deferentially and filially, and all that sort of thing. Go in and win. This is a very jolly place as a fall back upon; at any rate, we might make it so."

"Will you stop?" protested the other, again glancing towards the door.

"You see, I'm no catch in that direction," went on the gadfly. "I recognized that directly we saw each other, just as I spotted that beastly old Jack Durward's look when I first saw him—you know, as if he'd like to put down one of his beetlecrushers and squash. But that's no reason why *you* shouldn't have a look in. I'll get out of your way and give you a clear field. Then you—we—can give out I've gone for good. That'll turn the scale."

"I shan't listen to any more of this nonsense," said Mabel Filgay, going to the door. A high-pitched, disagreeable laugh followed her.

"Oh, keep your hair on, old parent; and you happen to have plenty of it, and it's all your own, which is more than can be said of mine."

Mollified by this remark, the older woman turned back.

"Why can't you lay yourself out to be less disagreeable, Muriel? You spoil everything for yourself. If you only knew how men hate that sort of thing."

The girl's greenish eyes looked greener.

"But I do, and I like to see them hate it. They look such fools. Men—men—always men! Well, I can do without them. I've seen too much of them to lay myself out to kow-tow to the brainless, selfish beasts. Oh, yes, I know what you're going to say, and I agree to that extent. They're useful enough to keep us going, and all that, so long as we aren't such fools as not to keep the whip-hand. If we are, then good-bye to us."

This amiable young person, you see, had a noble

grasp of woman's mission in life. She would have made an ideal recruit for the window-smashing, spitting-in-policemen's-faces brigade.

The little fluffy kitten which Selmin had taken out of the trap had quite recovered. Both he and Lauretta had taken it under their special care. As the former had said, a veterinary surgeon had been procured and had carefully dressed the injured paw; then Durward, on his return, had completed the treatment. It had quite attached itself to them, and simply tyrannised over the two dogs, Zulu and Croom, both of whom had been very easily taught to regard it with friendship. Now the three of them were playing about on the gravel walk in front of the house, the fluffy little ball playfully spitting, and boxing the perky Irish terrior's ear with a clawless pat. It would even follow them for short walks, together with the dogs.

"What a little sweet it is!" cried Lauretta, picking it up, and stuffing it into the hollow of her neck. "Do you know, I am glad you made them do away with those abominable traps."

"That's more than Dayson is. He's done nothing but grouse ever since," answered Selmin. "As a matter of fact, he'll over-grouse myself, and if it's some day when I'm in a short temper, why he'll get the key of the high road. But, I don't want that. I suppose I must try and look on him as the fly in the amber."

The little thing sat contentedly purring on Lauretta's shoulder. It shared the mat with the dogs, but it was even more favoured, for it enjoyed

the privilege of a music stool placed adjacent to Selmin's chair whenever they were at table, and became duly spoilt. He had not been able to trace its ownership: if it had belonged to any of the adjacent cottagers, they would have been reticent on owning it under the circumstances, although they need not have been.

"I've been thinking," he went on, "why shouldn't we have our moonlight picnic up on the Down to-night? It's settled and all that, and if the moon isn't so full as it might be, why we can supplement it with lanterns. We can drive to Warnington and leave the waggonette at the inn there, and then walk up."

"Oh, do let's. It would be simply heavenly," she answered.

The rich masses of woodland swept away almost from their feet, then billowing upward to the foot of the Downs. The whirr of a reaper-and-binder and the bark of a farm dog came up from the left, and the caw of rooks rising in black clouds from the newly-bared stubbles. The surface of the covert was just beginning to show sign of autumn gold, but the hanging beech woods under Canonbury Link kept their rich summer velvet unblemished. In and out of this or that flower-cup bees were delving, their low hum musical upon the golden air as they winnowed their way from one blossom to another. Ah, it was all fair and lovely beyond compare, this cloudless summer day! To one of these two, standing thus contemplating it together, it seemed as though there were nothing left to wish for on earth

or in heaven. Perchance it may so have seemed to the other. Who may say?

Footsteps on the gravelled walk behind made them turn. To them came the discreet and decorous Wade.

"If you please, sir, the captain would like to see Miss Enscott immediately. He is in the smoke-room alone."

"Anything wrong, Wade?" asked Selmin sharply, struck by the man's tone and manner.

"Well, sir, the fact is, the captain has just received a telegram."

Those telegrams! It is a remarkable thing that to ordinary people, in nine cases out of ten, an unexpected telegram is discounted in advance as bound to contain bad news, and—it generally does.

Lauretta found her father seated alone in Selmin's "den," even as the butler had said. He was looking very grave, and an open telegram lay in front of him. Without a word he handed it to the girl. She took it, started slightly, and her eyes began to fill. It stated that Enscott's only brother had met with a street accident—had been knocked down by a taxi, and fatally injured—was, in fact, not expected to last out the day. And for him both of them had a very great affection.

On being apprised of this Selmin lost no time in doing everything to facilitate their departure, and within less than half an hour such things as were immediately required were packed, and the trap was at the door.

"Good-bye, and believe me how deeply sorry I am," he said, as the train was sighted down the

long straight stretch of line which leads up to East Welstead station. "Perhaps it may not be so bad as it seems, but in any case I hope you will return here and finish your visit. I'll clear those other people out, and you shall have the place absolutely to yourselves, for as much as you like. Good-bye."

It seemed that neither could find voice for words. A warm pressure of the hand as the train drew up, and they were gone.

Selmin, driving back alone, felt a very real sense of loss, of bereavement, himself. The glad, golden, joyous summer had gone out of the day. The oaks were as green, so, too, the great patches of bracken between which the deer browsed peacefully on the other side of the high iron fence which skirted the road, but—a shadow had come over the sun. He passed the church, standing at the corner, where he had been with Lauretta on the day of the kitten episode. Two or three of the brown-faced, blue-jerseyed boys, who had attracted her interest, gave him a military salute as he passed, a custom that used to appeal to her, then he swung round to the right, and past the post office on to the broad, tarred high road. There in front was the green line of the Downs, soft beneath the summer sun; and with every ringing hoof-stroke, he was drawing nearer to his beloved home. But now—a shadow had come over; a curtain had fallen.

CHAPTER XX.

A DARK OPERATION.

JOHN DURWARD was sitting in his own room—alone.

The wind moaned outside, and over the line of the Downs the sea wrack lay like a tablecloth, through which the wind-swept crown of Canonbury Link showed but indistinctly and at times not at all. Yellow leaves, falling like snowflakes, strewed the lawn and flower beds, and the bare twigs and branches still held a few here and there. Selmingfold was fast going into mourning, or semi-mourning, which, if anything, was even more depressing than when every leaf should have been shed, and the "wine-coloured woods" should be gleaming with encrusted rime.

The two men were alone together again, even as when we first saw them. Captain Enscott and his daughter had not returned to renew their visit, and the Filgays had long since gone, nor had any others taken their places. Just now, Selmin was out, somewhere, and Durward sat in his own room alone.

Yet, although it was no longer summer, this magic country had charms of its own. In spite of Selmin's radical innovations in the game-preserving line, and old Dayson's dire and discontented prognostications, the shooting had proved excellent; further, it was first-rate hunting country, with a pack to match. What more ideal? And yet, and yet—there is always a something.

A cloud had come up between these two men, and although both strove to ignore it, well, it was there nevertheless. The old cordiality between them was unmistakably reduced to skeleton proportions, and the change dated from the coming of Lauretta Enscott.

We said that Durward was alone, but there was other life in the room, though not human. The tabby-and-white fluffy kitten lay curled upon the rug in front of the fire. Incidentally, Durward had carried it up to the room himself.

Now he picked it up, then put it down again, and stared at it moodily. The little thing showed an inclination to play, but finding no response, quickly curled up again.

More lurid than ever grew the brain-wave that was surging through Durward's thoughts as he sat there. His obsession became simply overpowering, and what a simple device! He would obtain possession of Selmingfold, and, ten to one, in the not very distant future, of Lauretta Enscott; and he himself ran no risk, not a shadow of risk whatever.

He got up, and carefully locked the door, then unlocking a tin despatch case, took out a small

wooden box, small, but very thickly and solidly built. Next, he put on a pair of rubber gloves, and carefully extracted from its embedding of cotton wool a curious-looking glass tube, which culminated at each end in a fine needle-like point. It might have been five or six inches in length from point to point.

Again he picked up the kitten. It snuggled up to him, and tried to play with his finger. Curiously enough, now it was on its account he began to feel compunction. Poor, pretty little thing, would it not be possible to find something less appealing upon which to prosecute his experiment ?

With his skilful surgeon's touch he broke off just the bare points of both the needle-like ends of the tube; then, holding the kitten firmly he inserted one end well under the skin just behind the shoulder blade. The little creature squirmed and struggled under the sharp pin prick, then ceased to feel it. The operator withdrew the tube and dropped it into the cavity of glowing coals within the grate. In a moment the glass had shrivelled and fused, then disappeared, *together with what it contained.* Omitting nothing in his trained carefulness he also dropped in the two tiny specks of glass which had been the extreme, and closed, points.

But for the, at times aggressive, at times hardly audible, ticking of a clock, there was that almost awful silence that will hang about a sparsely inhabited house in the heart of the country on a lowering, darkening, late autumn afternoon. Durward sat on, listening to it—to the silence. The

kitten, forgetful of its momentary inconvenience, had curled itself up again on the rug at his feet. And what a weight of human tragedy was now contained within that little innocent ball of fluff!

Selmin, we said, was out somewhere, and at this moment he was wandering aimlessly, and with no particular objective, in the woods around Laylock Pond. But how different now to then! In fact, now it seemed hardly possible to imagine the profusion of sunlight rushing through the wealth of foliage to strike into fire upon the water's face. He remembered how he had gaily deprecated the allusion to frost and ice on that memorable day, but now the contrast seemed equally strong in the other direction. But, if anything, even that—the glass mirror of jolly Jack Frost—sheeted out upon the surface would effect a cheery contrast in comparison with the ghostly drip, drip, of wet, falling leaves, the damp, mossy scent of decaying vegetation, the silence, the murk.

Here was the spot where he had first beheld "the picture," with the background of gleaming water, and sensuous masses of sun-pierced leafage. And now—

> "When the rotten woodland drips
> And the leaf is stamped in clay."

He had pressed the Enscotts to return and complete their visit, but they had not done so. Grief over the loss of their relative had disinclined them. Selmin had heard from them, but had shrunk from intruding upon them with a visit. Lauretta had written him a kind, friendly, appreciative letter;

but it seemed that the sudden black curtain which had fallen across the green and gold of that summer day, had shut off everything. So now, wandering aimlessly in the glooming woods by Laylock Pond, he felt extraordinarily depressed.

He passed the boathouse. A cock pheasant, disturbed, clattered into the air, with a shout that seemed to raise a deafening din in the dark silence. He passed the head of the huge pond, and smiled sadly and faintly, as he glanced at the exact site of the capture of that first perch. Selmin, like a good many men who had spent large segments of their lives alone, was prone to melancholy upon slight cause; self-concentration produces that effect.

With that for a cause, now being alone, self-concentration produced the effect. Now he told himself that he had all along been under a delusion, had deluded himself, in fact, with regard to Lauretta's feelings. He had wanted to see rose colour, and had seen it. And then some whimsical turn in the wheel of recollection brought back to him his own words, uttered there on that very spot, or within a few yards of it.

"You can see anything if you make up your mind to see it."

Then some equally whimsical twist of mind in its sequence led his steps onward to "Excalibur Pool."

The glooming twilight was darker still here in the depths of the wood. The circular pool stared faintly white like a lack-lustre eye, lashed with its fringe of now yellowed bulrushes. The two overhanging oaks showed gnarled leafless boughs, or

well-nigh leafless, against the murk of the sky. And then—and then—a very curious feeling came over Selmin, one to which indeed he was an entire stranger. For a sudden and almost irresistible impulse had come upon him to turn and walk away from the spot, and that as fast as he could walk, nor yet to turn and look behind him once.

Why, what on earth——? He remembered when he had told Lauretta the legend of the pool, and his own frankly robust profession of unbelief. He remembered how he had told her that he would not go out of his way to see anything that he knew he never could see, and yet—and yet——. What was there now that chained him to the spot, that sent a dead, cold chill through him?

The story of the appearing hand. He remembered how she had thrilled to it, even amid the summer glories of the glowing noontide. Now the drear, lack-lustre eye stared at him in a cold circle from its fast darkening setting—the twilight woods.

This was idiotic—perfectly idiotic, he told himself. He shivered. He had caught cold, he likewise told himself. The sooner he got home, and outside something to counteract that, the better. He pulled himself together with an effort, and yet—did not go. For——

What was that? Only the sound of water. From the exact centre of the pool a target of rippling circles was radiating. Another followed. The soft sound as they lapped the dead bulrushes was clear and audible enough on the silence. Yet another, and still from the direct centre. It was as if a some-

thing massive, forcible, were slowly rising to the surface. The watcher, now rooted to the spot, had already begun to wonder what *would* rise.

"How can any sane man believe in such rubbish?" he had said to Lauretta. He remembered the words; in fact, they came back to him so vividly that they might almost have been spoken by some mocking demon voice. Yet, the fact remained that, now he stood there watching that cold, silent eye of water, with a kind of horrified enchantment.

Something did come to the surface. There was a boil of bubbles, and a dark something that he could not define. Then it sank down again, and the ripples ceased. The spell was broken.

Selmin moved from the spot. Was this superstition, that he had scoffed at, justified in results? He was in the mood for being affected by things of the kind that evening. A big pike? But there were no fish of any kind in the pool. There was something about the water that fish shied at. Ah, an otter, of course! Fancy being scared by an otter! But together with this perfectly sound reflection he was bound to tell himself that it was no otter.

He could have sworn he had beheld a very different shape. Again came back to him his own words: "You can see anything if you make up your mind to see it." But then, he had not made up his mind to see it. What, however, if his mind had made itself up for him, though all unconsciously?

An owl hooted in the wood, then dropped down on noiseless pinions to glide, a white ghost, in front of him down the darkened ride. Another answered

it. Somehow, the melodious voices of the beautiful night birds cheered him; he reflected, with cynical mirth, how the hoot of an owl, than which there is nothing more melodious in the solemn night woods, inspired numerous and superstitious idiots of both sexes with apprehension. It also had another effect. It pulled *him* up with a round turn. Had not he himself been giving way to superstition, there by the circular pool, with the "troubling of the waters," and all that sort of thing?

Like most "up-country" going men, a type which is fast growing a thing of the past, Selmin was imaginative, reticent, contained. That and the circumstances of long habit had led him into a certain pessimism with regard to himself and his own and immediate desires and aspirations. You cannot eradicate that sort of thing; it is the product of a certain habit of life, acting of course to a certain degree upon temperament. Now he had fallen back upon himself, and at once the plant had begun to sprout forth again.

It was dark now, and more owls hooted. More than once he stood to listen as they floated noiselessly over his head. The scent of the moist woods came up with a nutty fragrance to his nostrils, and he owned these woods, owned a fairest fragment of this round ball called the Earth. Why, then, in the name of this said Earth should he give way to all sorts of dismal forebodings? he asked himself. And again the sweet melodious hoot of an owl sounded above the tree-tops, and again it cheered him. Even a part of wild Nature he owned, and he

loved it. When the year should turn, the land would be radiant with yellow primroses, aflame with daffodils, jubilant with variant and gurgling thrush song. Of a truth it was a crime to give way to melancholy now, only because Lauretta Enscott had undergone a temporary bereavement, and he himself had been stricken by a sudden and momentary superstition,

"Hallo, Jack," he cried, breaking in upon Durward in the snug, well-lighted den. "What have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon? Doing a snug laze and a read, I suppose? Look out. You'll put on weight." Then, picking up the kitten, "Little puss-puss. Why, you're growing, getting quite big. Then you won't be nearly so tricky. We'll have to get another wee one, out of a trap for choice, to take your place."

The little fluffy ball was frantically playing with his finger, and playfully biting it. Durward looked on queerly. It didn't matter, of course, yet—he was thinking. Selmin pressed a button.

"Whisky and soda," he said, as the man answered it, and sinking into an armchair, with the kitten jumping to and fro between his shoulder and his knees. "We'll be snug, eh, Jack? Wandering about by oneself in the coverts at this time of the evening has a tendency to make one Dismal Jimmy. But this is a good contrast. What? Reach over that box of weeds, will you?"

Durward took down a cigar box from the mantelpiece. He said something in reply as he lit up in concert and filled a sparkling measure. But another

kind of contrast was that which presented itself, and in lurid colours, within his own brain. And as Durward was not a good plotter, in that his moods were too variable, it followed that be became not exactly cheerful even under the influence of every present bodily comfort. Well, it was not too late yet, he told himself, as he watched his kinsman toying with the innocent little animal, not yet.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SHADOW.

"I CAN'T make out what's the matter with this fluffy ball," said Selmin. "Look. It won't eat."

For the kitten, which, as we have said, was enthroned on a music stool whenever they sat down to table and shockingly spoiled, now took no notice of its favourite delicacies which he had taught it to sit up and take, daintily and prettily.

"Someone must have been stuffing it already," suggested Durward.

"No fear. They're under strict orders not to, except when I'm away."

"Well, orders are sometimes broken," said Durward.

"Here Fluff, let's have a look at you," went on Selmin, picking it up. "No, it's anything but stuffed. Why—what?"

This quickly. For the little thing, always so confiding and affectionate, began to growl in a very bad-tempered way.

"Why, what on earth can be the meaning of it,

Jack? It must be ill. Now I look at it, its eyes don't seem as bright as they should be. Is it distemper?"

He released it, and it fled under a big chair, where it lay crouched against the wall, making a series of piteous sounds, half growl, half moan.

"It might be that," answered Durward.

"Poor little Fluff. Here come to me," and Selmin rose, his face and voice full of concern, and went over to the chair under which it was lying. But the little creature growled harder than ever at his attempts to coax it forth.

"You'd better leave it," warned Durward. "A bite from a sick animal might be worse than from a well one."

"But—could you do anything for it?"

"I might be able to. But I'm not a vet. you know. Animal treatment is a speciality. Why not get over the vet. from Steynhurst? It would be more satisfactory."

"I think I'd better. It's horrible to see an animal you've been fond of suffer. Poor little beast! It reminds me of the time when I took it out of the trap. Do you think it may be a sort of after-effect of that, by the way?" he added, quickly.

"Shouldn't think so. The wound was completely healed, and sterilised. No. It may be distemper, but I shouldn't touch it, if I were you."

"But I hate not to."

"Naturally, but we've got to do what we hate sometimes. But, send for that vet. for your own satisfaction, if you reckon it worth while."

"I should rather think I did reckon it worth while," answered Selmin, emphatically, and almost with heat; for he was a little put out by the seeming indifference wherewith Durward was treating the whole thing. "When I get fond of anything, I can't stand seeing it in pain." Then he rang the bell and gave the necessary orders.

But it happened that the vet. was away, and was not expected back till evening. Word was left, by Selmin's instructions, that he should call immediately on his return. But he did not call that night, nor the next morning, either. Selmin grew impatient, and chafed mightily.

"It's a rum thing, Jack," he said. "I've had horses die, one in fact, was shot under me, as the saying goes, and still it was very far from being the same thing as this poor helpless, fluffy little pussie, that curls up at the foot of my bed every night. There's something so appealing about it, and we seem able to do nothing to relieve it."

"If you'll take my advice you'll have it secluded now," said Durward, with professional gravity. "You mustn't think of letting it curl up at the foot of your bed to-night."

"No, of course not, while it's got anything the matter with it. But where shall we put it?"

"Not in the house at all. You've got some disused stables. Put it in one of those. With plenty of hay it'll be warm enough."

"Well, I suppose that'll do," assented the other, somewhat reluctantly. "I'll take it out there now."

"No, no." And Durward laid a strong, restrain-

ing hand upon him. "Don't touch it. Leave that to me. Mind, while I'm out of the room you mustn't attempt to touch it."

"All right," answered Selmin, astonished at the importance his relative was attaching to the affair.

It may seem strange that Durward, having plotted and contrived the whole thing, should be so reluctant to allow the other to fall a victim to his plot. But we have already twice seen the curious inconsistency of his character in connection with this obsession of his—once on the brow of the chalk pit, and again in the matter of the poisoned arrows. Now, as he stood within his own room, and got out his rubber gloves, also a calico bag which closed with strings, he hesitated. Should he not, even now, undo his own work, and start once more clean-souled and with a clear conscience? It was not too late. It would be the easiest thing in the world to destroy the little animal without imparting to his relative the ghost of a notion as to the real state of affairs. And then there hit him like a lightning bolt the thought that it might actually be too late.

Selmin was fond of playing with the little thing, in the course of which it would seize his finger in its sharp little teeth; playful bites, certainly, and not such as to draw blood. But what if it had, to ever so slight an extent? Well, even then the inoculation might not have had time to take root. Then, again, that lurid brain surged over his mind. Selmingfold, and afterwards the object of his desire. He went downstairs again.

"Well, you haven't touched it, eh?"

"No, I admit I tried to, and it spat at me—actually spat—little Fluff!"

Durward's conscience felt in a measure relieved, if not stilled. If his kinsman was such a fool as to disregard his own emphatic advice, why, he deserved all he should get, and his own responsibility was at an end.

He went over to the chair and gently removed it. The kitten lay crouched against the wainscoting, still growling, and again it spat. With a deft movement, Durward had the bag over it, and it was a prisoner, helpless.

"Poor little Fluff!" exclaimed Selmin, with concern, as it was deftly released into its new prison-house. "I wish that vet. would come."

And then he went off to busy himself about matters connected with the place.

While he was thus engaged, the vet. did come. But Selmin was away down beyond Laylock Pond, and did not, of course, know of his arrival; indeed, not until a couple of hours later did he return to the house.

"I wish I'd been here," he said. "Well, what does he say about it?"

Durward was looking very grave, with a gravity which the state of a sick animal could hardly have produced in him. This Selmin noted, and a strange, shadowy feeling of apprehension came over him—why, he could not in the least have told.

"He says—well, he confirms an opinion which I had half formed from the first," answered Durward. "You remember my warning to you, more than once,

on no account to touch. it Well, he's of opinion that it has got—rabies."

Selmin started, and was conscious that a cold pallor was stealing over his face.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Hydrophobia?"

Durward nodded.

"He's afraid so."

Selmin stared at him. He realised that the cold pallor which had come over his face had changed to ashy, waxen.

"But, it bit me," he uttered hoarsely.

"When?" said the other quickly.

"Why, when I took it out of the trap."

"Not since?"

"No."

"Quite sure?"

"Quite. Ah, now I see why you said I mustn't on any account touch it."

"You're right there. Well, now, Selmin, that was—let me see, nearly four months ago, and if there had been anything the matter then it would have come out in it and in you long before this."

"You forget that case—only last year—where it took six months to come out."

"Yes, but that was so utterly abnormal, apart from the fact that some of us were convinced that it was by no means conclusively proved. But you're quite sure there's been nothing since? It bites you sometimes when you play with it, you know."

"Never to draw blood."

"Then I don't think you need be afraid. But——"

"But—what?" said the other quickly.

"I was going to say, but—it might be just as well to be on the safe side."

"Ah! Can you give me something for it? You're no end of a chap as a surgeon, Jack. But I thought it was too small at the time to have anything of that sort, or I might have had the bite attended to at once, cauterized or something. But you were away, and I thought no more about it."

"There we both made a mistake," said Durward, gravely. "I ought to have remembered that it's always impossible to swear that an animal that bites is free from rabies, and to have insisted on something being done. Well, now, the next best thing for you to do is to be treated at first hand. So you'd better go over to Paris and put yourself under the Pasteur treatment. This kind of thing is no joke, mind, and not to be played with. Start at once, by to-night's boat, even. Here, buck up, man! I'm only recommending this as a matter of precaution. You know, as I told you, if there had been anything in it, why the symptoms would have shown long ago. Come and have a peg—that'll pull you together. And, meanwhile, don't discount the worst. I tell you the chances in your favour are a thousand to one. That's good enough, isn't it?"

Selmin began to feel to a certain extent reassured. Had be been threatened with an ordinary illness, typhoid, even small-pox, it would not have overstrained his courage. But this was such an appalling form of suffering—of death. To be changed from a strong, healthy, even-balanced man into a raging,

jaw-foaming, biting wild beast, and no human power available to avert such a fate, small wonder indeed if his nerve failed, and quailed, and shrivelled up under the prospect. And when life was at its zenith, too; when he had fallen upon circumstances which made life almost too good to live, and now for this terrible lightning bolt to fall out of the blue! Lightning bolt? Why that were merciful compared with this. It was swift, at any rate, if sudden. But—this!

"Look here," said Durward, as they sat together, partaking of his impromptu prescribed remedy. "You must keep an even mind on you, Selmin. Remember what I said just now, the chances are a thousand to one in your favour after all this time. That's a good sporting chance, isn't it? Come now!"

Selmin admitted it was. A reaction had begun to set in, perhaps Durward's prescribed palliative bore in its favour; it does sometimes, and that usefully, depend upon it, in spite of mealy-mouthed moralising to the contrary. But it was strange that Durward, who had plotted, and, in intention, had carried out, the ill, should be so assiduous, even earnest, in emphasising the remedy. But, there you are! When his great obsession was upon him the man was a mass of inconsistencies, of contradictions, and now he had another obsession added to that.

"I'll give you a letter to the Pasteur people," he went on. "I'm not altogether unknown in my line, perhaps not even on the Continent; and a thing of that sort—well, you never know how it may come in useful. But pull yourself together, and don't discount the worst, as I said before."

"Yes. You're right, Jack. I say, though, but what about poor little Fluff? I suppose it ought to be—well—sent to sleep, eh? Might be dangerous to other people?"

Thus the man, who suffering, as he had reason to apprehend, from one of the most dreadful ills that could afflict human nature. Yet he could think compassionately of the innocent cause of the same.

"No. Not on any account," answered Durward, decisively. "The very last thing to be done. It must be kept alive so that I can study its symptoms from day to day."

"Yes, but— You'll put the poor little beast out painlessly when you've done with it, won't you?"

"Of course, I will. You may rely upon that. Leave it to me."

That afternoon Selmin left Selmingfold for Newhaven to catch the night packet for Dieppe.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN PROFUNDO.

SELMIN, seated in a cane chair on the deck of the night packet for Dieppe, was full of his own thoughts, the very worst condition of mind in which he could have found himself. Why had he not persuaded Durward to accompany him? That, at any rate, would have taken him, to a certain extent, out of himself. Then he remembered that he had thrown out a hint to that effect, which had not been taken, and, as we said before, the relations between the two men were not quite so cordial as they had been.

The night was fine. The stars twinkled out frostily above from a cloudless vault, but there was a small choppy sea on, and the swift, powerful boat sheared its onward way, throwing up two great ridges of phosphorescent light which cascaded to the surface with a hiss and a splash, to stir up more. Selmin, seated alone in a sheltered corner, began to feel drowsy in the rushing salt air. Yet that ever present horror of brooding apprehension would

avail to keep him awake. This dreadful thing was upon him and he tortured himself with the idea at the rate of a hundred hours to one. But why? His philosophy had been equal to many a strain, where he had been face to face with deadly peril, not merely for hours but for days. Yet this! Why it was so totally different; a thing against which he was powerless to combat. Against living enemies, well, he had stood and won, once, indeed, by the narrowest of Providential shaves. But—this?

A few passengers were scattered about the deck, singly or in twos or threes; but most were below, for the night, though fine, was cold. Selmin could not stand the mephitic atmosphere of 'tween decks, and he was well wrapped up. Another hour would see them in port. Then, a few more hours and he would know his fate, at the hands of the very first scientific authorities in the world. But, meanwhile, he must sit by himself in the darkness, and brood alone.

He thought of this glad new life he had entered upon, and how it had seemed without a flaw, without a cloud. He thought of Lauretta Enscott, who had come into it so unexpectedly, and whom, he had told himself, not without reason, he might induce to share it with him. But now?

It is a dreadful thing to be self-centred. Everything exaggerates so. What seems comparatively trifling when taken out of oneself, assumes hydra proportions when brooded upon alone; and Selmin's was just such a case. Of course life had become too smiling, too glowing, too golden; how then could

anything other than disaster swoop down from the Great Unexpected?

The swift, powerful steamer rushed on through the night. Here and there the lights of other craft cleft the darkness like so many golden eyes; but still Selmin sat there, torturing himself with retrospect. Now he recollected that the little creature had once bitten him, always playfully, but rather hard, while he had been playing with it. He had forgotten this while talking things over with Durward, but now it came back, or was it that his fevered and riotous imagination had exaggerated again?

And then he thought of the "Excalibur" Pool, and the vague apparition, troubling the water in the darkness. No, he would not think of that. It was superstition—sheer rotten superstition.

He got up, and began to pace the deck restlessly. All the events of the past few months were chasing each other through his brain. The bright beautiful summer, every day of which he had lived—thoroughly lived—came up again before him; the radiant, sunlit woods round Selmingfold, the glorious open of the Downs, the rush of healthy warm air, healthy because open, even in the summer heat. How he had revelled in it. And, the other presence which had come into his life! He told himself that he had made the best of the time, not one single day that he had not made the best of. And he had been looking forward—dwelling happily in—the consciousness that he was going to insure that it should last. Well—well! That was life. Surely

this cruel world was ruled by the devil. Now here he was, practically under sentence of death, and such a death! Why? For having performed an act of mercy, of sheer ordinary humanity.

There was a glow in the darkness of the sea. A big Hamburg-American liner outward bound swept past them quite close astern, her lighted scuttles gleaming like myriad eyes. Selmin looked at the rushing, sparkling mass, and wondered where he would be when she got back to port.

"Fine night, sir," said a quartermaster's gruff but hearty voice, at his elbow.

"Yes, splendid, for the time of year. Big boat that."

"Yes, sir. Bound New York. Don't lose no time over the run neither. She'll be back almost before we've made half a dozen runs, so to say."

Selmin chatted with the man for a few minutes, and then the sailor had to leave to attend to his duties.

"We'll be in in another hour, sir," he said. "Lord, some of them passengers are that sick below, mostly women, though, and on a sea like this! Why, it seems to me you've only got to show a female the sea and she gets sick at once, or leastways to show her a ship."

"Yes, that's right. It's all imagination. No. one's ever seasick when they're asleep. Here, quartermaster, get a glass of grog when we get in, or before, if you can."

"Thankee sir. Hope you'll have a pleasant time. Paris, I suppose, sir?"

"Oh, yes, Paris," answered Selmin, thinking of the "pleasant" nature of his pilgrimage thither.

The ship rushed on. Selmin continued his walk. There was no one on deck now. The few passengers who had been had dwindled below stairs, to take a few "splits" at the bar, perhaps by way of fortifying against the tiresome ordeal of the Customs, which, by the way, at French ports, though tiresome, is no ordeal at all. The deck was littered with Gladstone bags and suit cases and strapped-up bundles of wraps, but there was a fair amount of space for walking.

Selmin went aft and looked over the stern. A cloud of golden stars in a veritable milky way was chopping up from the propellers. It fascinated him, and he leaned over to watch it. He was completely alone, and it seemed hard to realise that in less than an hour this loneliness of sea and sky would be exchanged for the fuss and bustle of an ordinary French Custom house, and a scramble for the best seats in the Paris train. But of such were the contrasts of life, and now, looking out upon the dark heaving sea, and the spangle of starlight, he began to think how it would be with him on his return. Would it be that he was returning to set his affairs in order and then pass out gracefully, for he had already made up his mind that he would not pass out as a raging, raving wild beast? Or that, like the lepers of the parable, would he return "clean"?

The suspense was what unhinged him. Could he have gone straight away and have obtained a verdict

within an hour or so, one way or the other, it would have been different. But this long delay, this wearisome journeying by boat and train, was what ate into him—what unhinged him.

Was it this, perhaps? Was it a sort of temporal mental dizziness, or was it that the boat was brought round at something of a sudden and jerky swerve to avoid running down a fishing lugger bound for the cod-banks of Newfoundland? But at any rate, Selmin, seated on the taffrail right at the stern, swayed, clutched, was unable to recover his balance by just a hairsbreadth of gravity, and dropped like a stone far down into the depths of the Channel.

We said he was well wrapped up. The weight of his ulster was such that it would hardly allow his twelve stone, *plus* winter clothing, to rise to the surface. However, he did so rise eventually, in time to see the packet boat nearly half-a-mile away, and with the breath so utterly knocked out of him by the depth and the unexpectedness of his involuntary dive, as to leave him utterly powerless to articulate anything more carrying than a sort of half-choked, raucous yelp, audible perhaps for twenty yards, or double that distance on the water.

He was a strong swimmer, but his heavy ulster, weighing perhaps some ten or twelve pounds, clung about him and especially about his legs, to say nothing of his thick winter boots. All this drew him under water again, and even the feeblest attempt to strike out seemed fettered. But he kept his head, and when this came above the surface again, he made no wild attempts at swimming strokes.

For he realised what he had often told other people, that it takes very little indeed to keep oneself afloat; that whereas most people directly they find themselves precipitated into deep water, whether from a boat capsize or any other cause, seem to think that every second is of vital value in getting out of it, the real fact of the situation being that there is no hurry at all. The real object is to keep afloat, and very little effort will effect this, and for hours.

This theory Selmin now began to put into force. He economised his strength, devoting it all to just keeping his head above water. He saw the receding light of the steamer, now far distant. He could see an odd light or two of other craft, but very much farther still. He was alone in the midnight sea, just able to keep his head above water. But, how long would he be able so to keep it?

There came in the rub. Selmin's theory was absolutely correct, absolutely and admirably correct, but it was terribly handicapped; first by the deadly and weighing-down effect of a heavy, clinging ulster, secondly by the deadly, numbing cold of the English Channel in winter. Incidentally the said Channel is none too warm even in the dog days, but in winter and the small hours of the morning!

The waves were short and choppy, and though mere ripples as seen from the decks of a biggish steamer, now with his head just above them—and only just—Selmin found that it was all he could do to keep up at all. What breath he needed to sustain himself and the weight of his heavy clothing was cut short in a gasp and a splutter of salt water, as

each breaking crest, small as it was, shot a shower of spray into his eyes and nostrils: he was not fool enough to open his mouth. He could see no light anywhere near. Would the steamer put back to search for him, he wondered, when his disappearance was discovered? But then he remembered how absolutely alone he was on deck when he had fallen over. They would not discover his absence till they moored alongside at Dieppe, even if then. No. His case was bad, well-nigh hopeless.

It was a strange thing that even as one nail drives out another so this new and physical peril had seemed for the time being to have driven out all thought of the other—the terrible mental canker which had been eating into him. In this, so to say, he felt, in a way, at home; though it sounds a queer definition as applied to a man floating hopeless in well-nigh mid-Channel in the dark hours of a winter night, and barely able to keep his head above water at that. Yet the need for hard physical exertion told, and that was exactly the sort of situation that this one was used to. He husbanded his strength, using just no more than the barest effort needed to keep him afloat, and that he knew would be sufficient to keep him afloat for hours.

But there was one factor which he realised, and that his realisation was creeping upon him more and more, was creeping over him physically, too—the cold.

The deadly, numbing, stupefying cold. Thanks to the thickness of his clothing, it had not at once struck through to paralyse him—so far, the anti-

buoyant effect of the said clothing had its compensating element. But by degrees it got at him. No sign of aid, of succour. The distant riding lights of craft had all but disappeared. He was alone, drifting helpless with the tide, his carefully-husbanded efforts growing fainter and fainter. A kind of stupor, of lethargy, came over him, as more and more the numbing icy cold began to wrap itself around him, to bite into his system. What was the use of further struggle?

And then, before his drowsing brain, came a vision of Selmingfold; of the woods around Laylock Pond in their summer wealth of greenery; of "Excalibur" Pool, as he had last seen it in the glooming drip of the winter woods; of the strange appearance that had twice troubled its surface. That story was true, at any rate, for here he was, sinking to a watery death. He thought of Lauretta Enscott, as they stood beside the pool together, and how he had hurled scorn at the legend. He thought of her in her sweet, dark beauty; her winsomeness, her delightful grace and charm of manner, and then he thought no more of her, or of anything or anybody else on earth. A great roar of waters, and a rush of flashing light, seemed to come before his vision when the curtain fell.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEWS—FOR TWO.

"FEARED disappearance at sea."

Thus the headline. The paragraph went on:

"Fears are entertained that a passenger on board the packet *Streak*, crossing from Newhaven to Dieppe the night before last, has fallen overboard. On arrival of the packet at the French port in the early hours certain luggage, labelled for Paris, remained unclaimed. A trunk—registered—had been taken into the Customs, where it now lies, but a large Gladstone bag and a bundle of wraps were retained on board. The whole bore passenger labels—'Selwyn, Paris; viâ Dieppe.' There is reason to think there has been an accident, for upon enquiry one of the quartermasters who had charge of the landing arrangements, on the question arising, at once remembered that a certain passenger he had noticed, and who had spoken to him during the crossing, had certainly not left the steamer at Dieppe. This gentleman the sailor describes as a tall, good-looking man, with a sun-browned face as though he

had spent a good deal of his life in the open air; in fact, rather out of the ordinary looking. He had noticed him, too, through the window of the smoke-room in the brilliancy of the electric light."

Durward, reading the morning paper in the "den" at Selmingfold after breakfast, glanced through this paragraph at first with but scant interest. But something about the close of it made him start half out of his chair, as though he had suddenly sat on the point of a pin. He had passed the name, hardly noticing it in fact. But the description *and* the name! Selwyn! It was near enough, when coupled with the description, and those newspaper people did make such idiotic muddles over names. Selmin and Selwyn were just the sort of names they would be likely to muddle up with each other, and Selmin *had* gone on board to cross over that very night. Good heavens——!

If this were true Durward would have attained to his ambition. He would be Durward of Selmingfold. More than once, before the embitterment on the subject had returned to obsess his mind, he and his relative had exchanged chaff as to it.

"You're the next man in, Jack, in the ordinary course," the latter had said. Then Lauretta Enscott had appeared upon the scene, and of course had entirely changed the face of everything. His, Durward's, chances of succession had grown infinitesimal, not to say, nebulous. But now?

Somehow or other he did not feel as elate as he ought to have felt—or thought he ought—and now that he had in all human probability attained his

end, already the black drop had begun to distil within the cup. He recalled the old cordiality of the relationship between them, how this had always been open house to him since Selmin had owned it. He was not hard pressed for the actual means of support, far from it, yet he had driven this man to his death as surely as though he had carried out his first intention. But for him Selmin would not have crossed the Channel, and would not therefore have fallen into it unseen in the middle of the night.

"Fallen into it?" Another thought came into Durward's brain. What if he had dropped into it of express purpose. What if the awful apprehension of nearly, if not quite, the most appalling visitation known to science had so preyed upon him that it had fatally wrought upon his brain? He remembered the look of frozen horror wherewith Selmin had greeted his grave announcement and his advice to lose no time in putting himself under treatment at first hand, and by the most first-rate talent. By virtue of his profession and experience Durward knew how such an apprehension could run absolutely riot with the most well-balanced brain, and he was the one who had suggested it. True he had turned from his original and diabolically-murderous intention just in time, but the suggestion might have been equally effective, in which case would he not as equally and effectively have murdered his relative as though he had not so turned? More and more did the black drop spread within the cup, whereby it will be seen that John Durward was by no means made of the stuff which goes to constitute the

regulation "villain," as in all probability, very, very few are.

But now it occurred to him to take steps to verify the report, and to this end he got out a telegraph form and indited a full and lengthy message to the agency of that cross-Channel service at Newhaven. Then he rang the bell.

"Wade, I want someone to take this in to Steynhurst at once. He'd better go on the bicycle, it's quicker than a horse, and if he gets punctured on the way tell him to ride on all the same on the flat tyre and get it repaired there. But I want it sent at once. And tell him to bring back all the morning papers. I'm afraid it's too soon for any early evening ones."

"Yes, sir," answered the faintly astonished butler. "I think Alfred," naming one of the stable lads, "is about the smartest on the bike, sir. He'll be the one."

"Very well. Start him without a moment's delay. If his machine is out of order, he can ride mine."

"Very good, sir." And Wade withdrew.

Durward sat a little longer, then got up restlessly. He went out into the stable-yard. In one of the disused stables by his directions the kitten had been kept. He unlocked the door, of which he alone had custody of the key, for it would have been in the highest degree unsafe to have allowed access to anybody and everybody. The little creature was confined in a large cage specially constructed under his own minute directions, and partitioned into

halves for cleaning purposes. Even this process he undertook himself, as also the feeding of the captive. It was supposed among the household that he was making it the subject of some important surgical experiment, for no hint of the real truth had been allowed to leak out.

As he entered, it sat up from its warm nest of hay, looked at him, and spat. Poor little thing! He felt actually sorry for it, but the time for putting an end to its sufferings was not yet. The symptoms must, in the interest of all concerned, be left to develop. Often and often it had lain, curled up, on his knees, and now it looked at him with glaring eyes, and spat and snarled.

Once he had a narrow escape, the recollection of which even now caused him a shudder. In process of ministering to its wants he had imagined a particle of its saliva had reached him. He had at once gone upstairs and examined his hand under a powerful magnifying glass, then had applied a strong disinfectant. But the lens had disclosed not the faintest trace of any abrasion, and he had felt safe. He had carelessly omitted to use his rubber gloves on that occasion, but it was an omission which was never repeated.

It was not the time for feeding it now, so he withdrew, carefully locking the door. Restlessly he took his way down between the now empty flower beds and out into the paddock, which led down to the covert path. Old Dayson, the head-keeper, passed him with the usual and characteristic crusty greeting, then he stopped.

"Be there any news of Squire, zur?" he said.

"Well, there's hardly time as yet, Dayson," he answered. "He only went the day before yesterday."

But to Durward, cool, professional man as he was, the question brought home to him the fact that his nerves were not what they should be. They were overwrought. Even the old man's natural question had taken on a certain significance, and somehow or other brought to mind the other old rustic's comment, in front of the inn at Warnington, when they had just got back from the Downs. "'E was near t'edge o' the pit. Tarrble straight drap there." *Was* there significance in it? Then he pulled himself together. For one of his scientific and well-balanced mind to let such be disturbed by any chance remark of this or that ancient yokel! No. It was unthinkable.

He entered the sad gloom of the covert path. The day was lowering and murky, and the drip, drip of moisture fell audibly upon the layers of wet dead leaves which carpeted the ground beneath the trees. A cock pheasant rose with clattering clamour, then another. Further on he put up a woodcock, the competed-for prize of the shoot, therefore, frequently and inexcusably missed. Well, all this was his now or would be, directly. Yet the taste, the savour, had gone out of it. He felt at that moment that he would have given all he was worth to see his kinsman walking beside him here again in the old familiar way.

And the other stake for which he had played? Might not that be within his reach now? And then

time would soften it all down, he reasoned, would deaden recollection, compunction. Time never failed in effecting that remedy. his experience told him.

It began to drizzle, then to rain. Durward turned up his coat collar, and started to retrace his steps towards the house. By the time he reached it an answer would have come to his message, for he had wandered some distance—perhaps purposely.

When he reached it the answer had not yet come. But he had not been in long before it did. He took the telegram and the newspapers brought into him with an outward show of calm ; then, left alone, he tore open the former.

It was even as he thought. The message stated concisely that, although boat train passengers' names were not entered anywhere on the Company's books, yet the labels seemed to afford ample identification in this case. The name on these was Selmin, not Selwyn, and there seemed no doubt that the passenger in question had fallen overboard in mid-crossing unseen by anybody.

Durward threw down the telegram and picked up the newspapers. Hurriedly he rustled over the sheets of interminable advertisements. Ah, there it was. Here, just the same, the name was rendered Selwyn. He rustled through another. It contained no report, or at least he could not find it. Yet another. This one had got it even as the Company had said. Selmin !

Durward dropped into a chair and began to think hard. What chance had any ordinary man, falling

overboard unseen in mid-channel and in the middle of the night, in winter, too, and fully clothed? None whatever. Now he, the thinker, was Durward of Selmingfold.

Yet, wait a moment. Selmin was not exactly an ordinary man, and he was a powerful swimmer. There was just that chance. He might have been picked up. And then, such curious twists and turns will the human mind take on that all the compunction which he had felt during his solitary stroll through the wet leafless covert seemed to take wings. With the possibility suggested—bare possibility as it was—all the old envy and covetousness seemed to revive to drive out compunction. What if it were to turn out that he was not Durward of Selmingfold, after all?

Just about the same time that Durward was reading the paragraph in the morning paper, someone else was reading it, too. In his snug small villa at Chislehurst, Captain Enscott, who, like most retired mariners and elderly gentlemen in general, was a man of habit, was wont to retire to his own particular smoking den with the morning paper and his after-breakfast pipe. Reading it, he stared, started, then stared again.

"God bless my soul!" he cried. "That's a rum coincidence. Lauretta!"

In obedience to the hail, his daughter promptly entered.

"What is it?" she said, her quick ear having taken in a startled note in his tone.

"Look at that," handing her the paper.

"Yes?" rapidly glancing down the paragraph, then looking up at her father's perturbed face. "It's a sad sort of thing; but——"

"But— Yes, that's just it, 'But.' Well, now, as I read that bit of news, somehow or other I read the name as Selmin. Call it what you like, but, I did. Now I wonder if, by any chance——"

"But it's not the same name at all," went on the girl. "Selmin is quite an uncommon name, and the other, though less uncommon, is still—well, it's not the same name."

"I tell you, that while I was reading it something told me it was. I can't tell you what, or how, or why, you can't account for these things, but—it did." And the old man got up and began to pace the small room as though he were pacing the bridge.

Something of his feeling communicated itself to the girl, and she was conscious of a dreadful pang of horror and dismay—and something else—at the bare thought.

"Oh, but it can't be," she persisted. "But couldn't we find out? It seems rather absurd, though, doesn't it?"

The captain stopped in his hurried walk.

"Absurd? Why should it be absurd to interest oneself in the possible fate of one of one's friends?"

"Well, no, since you put it that way. But how shall we find out?"

"Why, I'll wire to the agency of these boats. It's quite likely the papers may have mixed up the name. Let me see. I think the Newhaven branch will be the best. I know all about that sort of thing, you

see. Oh, and meanwhile, we'll get in some more of the papers, and see if they give a different name."

Both of these courses were adopted, and with like result. Which shows how two minds, apart by physical distance, can jump exactly in concert, and explains how the Newhaven packet agency was in receipt of a second exactly identical telegram, and returned an exactly identical answer. Also the investigation of different morning papers resulted in an exactly identical confirmation. The only difference being that in the case of Durward it was the result of working with knowledge, whereas, in that of Enscott, it was that of sheer instinctive intuition

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF A MEETING.

THE steamship *Tangipaho* was cleaving her way through the smooth, oily, green-blue waters of the tropical seas. She was a fine full-powered vessel of about 9,000 tons, not on the mail service, but carrying quite a fair complement of passengers, to whom a few days more or less at sea didn't matter in comparison with the few pounds' more or less difference between this company's charges and those of the mail liners, and she was bound for New Zealand. Now she was approaching the latitude of the line.

She was a large, comfortable boat, replete with every convenience – in fact, ideal for those not in a hurry, and these were not. Her twin propellers worked without vibration, her decks were spacious, and her cabins roomy. Yet she had one fault, of which more anon.

Now, however, this one fault did not come into evidence, and in the shade of the hurricane deck the passengers were diverting themselves in various ways; playing games, reading, flirting, getting up the

"sweep" on the daily run, anything you like. Just outside the gangway on the main deck the captain and the ship's surgeon stood talking together; they had just finished their diurnal round of inspection.

"Well, how's he getting on to-day?" the former was saying, in pursuance of a subject, which a slight interruption had occurred to break off.

"Quite right. He's clearer than he has been yet. A day or two more and he'll remember everything. It was fortunate for him we were not obliged to call anywhere. This period of complete and perfect rest has been the absolute saving of him."

"Well, of all the miracles, you can call it no less, that we should have got him on board at all," went on the captain. "I've seen some strange things since I was fool enough to become a sailorman; but this, though the least startling, is about the most absolutely miraculous."

"Yes, it was rather wonderful," assented the doctor. "I think I'll just go down and have another look at him now, if you don't want me any further, sir."

"No, no. Do all you can. I don't think either of us stand to lose anything over this case," he added, with a sort of dry cynicism, as he turned away.

The surgeon entered a cheerful, roomy, deck cabin, lighted by a large oblong glass window.

"Well, and how are we to-day?" he began, seating himself on the sofa opposite the bunk. He was a tall, well set-up, handsome man, with dark eyes, and a clear-cut, clean-shaven face.

"Oh, I think I'm nearly quite all right, in fact, I am quite. I'm going to turn out, and see what's going on. Rather hot, isn't it? But I ought to be used to that."

"Oh, it's hot, but it's jolly enough in the shade, and we make our own air as we go along. Yes, the best thing you can do is to turn out. We're running on a perfectly even keel—not that we were always, for we got a proper dusting down the Bay."

Here a steward entered.

"If you please, Dr. Enscott, sir, Mrs. Junk, the lady from the third-class, is in your cabin, sir, and would like to know when it would be convenient for you to see her."

"All right Barton. Tell the *lady* from the third class I'm engaged now, and shall be till after lunch. She can come again then."

"Yessir."

"An infernal tiresome old woman," went on the doctor when the steward had gone out. "She's got nothing on earth the matter with her, and comes boring me at all hours of the day, presumably because the conditions of my contract afford her the opportunity of her life of being 'quacked' for nothing. And I do literally 'quack' her—on the same terms."

But the laugh which accompanied the words was rather cut short. The man in the bunk had half started up, and was staring at the speaker in a bewildered sort of way.

"What did that fellow call you?" he said.

"By my name—Enscott. That's my name. We

haven't had an opportunity of becoming formally acquainted, owing to circumstances, Mr. Selmin; but that's it all right. Now we know each other."

His manner was so breezy, so cheerful—yet the patient lay staring at him with wide-opened eyes.

"You're not related to a Captain Enscott, by any chance?" he said. "A retired sea captain?"

"Rather nearly. He happens to be my parent."

"Just fancy that!"

Then Selmin began to talk. This had furnished the key to unlock the door which had come between him and his recollection. Now, looking at the man before him, he saw the strong family likeness to Lauretta. Once before, when he was but dimly conscious, something of the kind had struck him, but it had dimly clouded away into oblivion. Now it stood forth clear enough.

Now, too, everything came back, and he was able to tell the other all about himself, and Selmingfold, and the bright, beautiful summer, and how his father and sister had been his guests in his own house. In fact, his excitement on the subject rather concerned the other in his professional capacity.

"How awfully jolly! and what a funny thing we should have come together like this. Well now, look here, Mr. Selmin," looking at his watch, "I must leave you for a time, but we'll have no end of a yarn presently. Yes, you get up and go on deck; it'll do you all the good in the world."

"By the way," said Selmin. "One moment. How did you get hold of my name?"

"Why, you see, when you were ill, the skipper and

I investigated the contents of your pockets—to establish identity, you know. The skipper had them all put away in his safe, so they're all right."

"Why, of course, I never thought of that," said Selmin.

"Lord, to think that the governor and Lauretta should have been staying with you!" went on Enscott. "I only saw them for about half-an-hour before starting on this trip because we were ordered off to the Baltic to collect cargo, and then when we did meet, we were rather full of my poor old uncle's death, and had no time to yarn about anything else, or I should have been bound to have heard of you."

"But how did I get on board here?" pursued Selmin. "I thought I was drowned."

You were about as near it as any man Jack ever was. But we managed to fish you out, and here you are. You see, we don't put in anywhere till Cape Town, so there was no possibility of cabling to any of your people. I hope, by the way," becoming grave, "that no one——"

"Oh, I've got no one to bother their heads about me," Selmin answered, and with it came the thought of whether Lauretta, the sister of the very man he was talking to, would be anxious, or concerned, or more, when the news of his disappearance should be published abroad? Or Durward? And with this thought came another. Would Durward, all things considered, feel particularly regretful? Things of late had made him think perhaps not.

"Well, that makes it easier," went on the doctor. "When we get to Cape Town you'll be able to send

cables to make things right all round and get home by the first Union Castle boat; although you might do worse than put in a bit of a stay there. I only wish I could. It's no end of a jolly place, or, rather, the suburbs are, and there's a good genial club or two in the town."

"I know. Incidentally, I know the whole place by heart. But I think I'll go home."

"The deuce you do!" said the other, astonished.

"Rather. There's nothing about that part of the world that I've got to learn."

"Well, well. It's a very small world, after all. And to think that we should have run together like this. Well, now, see here," again looking at his watch, "I must really cut away. But we'll have another yarn presently. You get up and dress, and make yourself as jolly as you can. We've got rather a decent crowd on board, quietish—though that's no disadvantage, to my mind—but quite nice. And don't worry about anything. Just take things as they are, and you'll be as right as anything in no time. So long!"

Small world? Well, rather! thought Selmin, as he proceeded to get up and go through the process of dressing. To think that the first man he should find himself talking to, on awakening from the sleep of death, should be Lauretta's brother! And then it struck him from the comical side—that the only clothing he owned was that in which he had been picked up, and it was eminently unsuited for wear while crossing the Line, for instance. Well, there was probably a barber's shop on board, which

corresponds to a sort of Deep Sea Whiteley, where light ducks and other things could be obtained, if indeed, the said Deep Sea Whiteley, as is not infrequently the case, was not stocked with every known article except that which he required.

The captain happened to be pacing the deck as Selmin made his first appearance. He was a bluff, hearty man, with a bronzed face and heavy, close trimmed beard, and far more typical in aspect of deep water than Enscott, sen.

"Nice, cool day for the tropics, Mr. Selmin," he began. "I hope you're feeling all right."

"I am, thanks to the kind care you have all taken of me," was the answer. "Do you know, I find I know your doctor's people well. We've just been having a talk about them."

"So? Enscott's the right man. He's done two voyages with me. I don't care if he does two hundred, only I care if I do," added the captain, with a dry laugh.

"I was surprised to find him here. I thought he was on the Meridional Mail Line, same as his father."

"Oh, he left that. I believe he had some sort of a breeze with them, over a professional matter. No, I never knew his father, though I knew him by name. And you say he's retired."

"Yes." And then Selmin told about his acquaintance with the Enscotts, and the other said—

"Well, Mr. Selmin, you must make yourself perfectly at home here on board, and if there's anything I can do for you at any time or in any way, you've only got to say so. You see, I had to 'go through

your pockets' when you came aboard, for purposes of identification, so, between ourselves, I know exactly how you stand. But I've given orders to the chief steward that you are to have everything you want, and when we get to Cape Town our agents will be able to facilitate matters for you in other ways. Anything in the way of changes of clothes I daresay we can fix up for you among us."

"Well, I do realise how rescued shipwrecked people are treated now, I can tell you, captain," answered Selmin, with a laugh. "It's almost worth while being shipwrecked on those terms."

The days that followed were pleasant ones for Selmin. The passengers, especially those of the softer sex, were disposed to make much of him, and whether it was at table, or on the moonlit decks, or at a snug foregathering in the smoke-room before turning-in time, he always found a genial and sympathetic circle, for as Enscott had said, they had a nice set of people that voyage. And the soft heave of the folds of the blue sea as the ship glided southward into less torrid latitudes, the air and the glowing sunshine; all this was a sudden and sparkling contrast to the murky drip of Old England in midwinter, and just now suited his temperament thoroughly. His was, of course, no new experience of board-ship life as a passenger, and he felt himself thoroughly at home in it.

And, strange to say, the experience he had undergone, had been effective as a shake-up. The old, haunting, apprehensive obsession, which indeed had

been instrumental in starting him upon his travels, seemed to have dimmed, to have faded. He threw himself into the—temporary—life of those around him, and, in doing so, forgot the haunting shadow, or almost forgot it. Yet not entirely. When he was alone in his cabin at night—settling himself in his bunk, listening to the soft swish of the water as the vessel sheared her way through it, the terror would sometimes rise and stare at him.

We heard the captain of the *Tangipaho* use the term "miracle" in connection with the rescue of Selmin. Well, it was little short of such. When, succumbing to cold and exhaustion, he had let himself go, the roaring of water and the flashing of lights he had seen, as he thought, the creations of his own dying brain, were really produced by the progress of a great steamer, heading down Channel, at twelve knots an hour. In his stupor of exhaustion he had not been conscious of its approach, and as it rushed by him, so near as almost to suck him down in its undercurrent, there was one man on deck who caught a quick, but fleeting, glance of the floating figure, kept afloat by sheer mechanical, if feeble, movement. That man was Enscott—surgeon of the *Tangipaho*.

For some reason or other he had turned in, but had not been able to sleep. In the small hours he had started walking the decks to smoke a meditative pipe, and then, just as the great ship rushed by, from the glow shed on the water by her lights, he had seen the head of a man, and with his quick medical instinct had deduced that it was that of a

living man. To give the alarm was the work of a moment. A boat was dropped over, and the ship was brought round, and so Selmin found himself an unconscious passenger on board the *Tangipaho*, bound for New Zealand.

His unconsciousness lasted. He had been very near death, just about as near as anyone could possibly be. And that, combined with the mental strain he had been undergoing of late, produced a shock. His memory, even, had failed him. But a sudden discovery had brought it all back in a moment—the identity of the man to whom he owed his rescue, and his life.

CHAPTER XXV.

SOUND SENSE.

It was a fact, it may have been a curious one, but the more Selmin recovered his normal condition the more would the cloud grow and spread. A very few days now would see them in Table Bay, where he could obtain a return passage, yet now that it came to the point he seemed to shrink from that course more and more. He was all right here, but to go among a lot of new and strange people, from that he shrank—and then the ghastly idea clawed hold of his mind that such shrinking was part of the development of the fearsome germs that were lurking within him. Morbidly, too, he wondered what all these friendly and pleasant people would think if they knew that in their very midst there moved one who might at any moment turn into a raving, dangerous wild beast.

More and more he felt moved to confide in Enscott, and more and more he shrank—morbidly, too—from doing so. The two men had, naturally under the circumstances, become on very friendly, not to say

intimate, terms, but still Selmin shrank from laying bare this ghastly horror that obsessed him, and this, too, he regarded as part of the "symptoms."

Now, Enscott was no fool of a practitioner, and there was something about Selmin that puzzled him from a scientific point of view. He must have quite got over the effects of his shock, and there was no reason whatever why he should suddenly relapse into bouts of taciturnity, if not downright melancholy, at a second's notice—and that with growing frequency. He made up his mind to watch for an opportunity of solving the riddle, and if none came, why, he would make one. But one did come.

The two were seated together in Enscott's cabin one night. It was rather late, and two or three of the other officers who had been helping to dim the air with smoke for a part of the evening had said good-night and gone out.

"Well, three or four more days'll see us in, Selmin," he said. "I suppose you'll be glad of a chance to get home. I jolly well envy you."

"I don't know that I shall be so very glad," answered the other.

Enscott looked at him sharply.

"Look here," he said, "in that case why not make the round trip with us? You're not tied to time, I suppose, and I'm certain it would do you all the good in the world."

"I shouldn't wonder," was the answer, but made with no great enthusiasm. "The fact is, Enscott, I seem in these days to feel a sort of shrinking

horror of going among strangers I never felt before in my life."

Enscott knocked the ashes out of his pipe, threw that useful implement on to his table, and sat up.

"You've got something on your mind, Selmin," he said. "Now, we've known each other pretty well, in a pretty short time, and you know my people at home. So if you think I can help you, you may rely upon it I shall keep your confidence as sealed as if it had never been made—even if you had committed a murder," he added, with a laugh.

"You're right, Enscott. There is a something. But whether you, or anybody else is in the smallest degree likely to be able to help me is quite another matter. Are we safe here? No chance of being overheard?"

"None whatever, if we don't talk too loud."

"Well, where d'you think I was bound for when you picked me up in mid-Channel? I was bound for the Pasteur Institute to undergo treatment."

Enscott nodded.

"Tell me all about it from the very beginning."

This Selmin did. Not once did his listener interrupt. He made a note or two, and nodded occasionally.

"Durward?" he repeated, after the narrative was complete. "Let's have another look up as regards Durward."

He reached down a Medical Register from a shelf and turned the pages.

"Here he is. Yes, he ought to know what he's talking about. He's got more after his name than

I thought he had—and good, too. But that's no reason why he shouldn't be mistaken in this case; I don't mean as regards the animal but as regards yourself. In fact, I think it's in the highest degree probable that he was."

Some approach to lightening came over Selmin's now gloomy countenance at the words, and he looked up quickly.

"Do you?" he said.

"Certainly I do, and the more I think of it the more certain I am about it. You say you thought no more about the matter at the time of the bite, because the animal was too young to have developed rabies. Well, I am pretty sure you were right. What has happened is almost certain to have been implanted in it since."

The look of intense relief which had come over the face of the other convinced Enscott that the plan he had laid himself out to pursue was absolutely the correct one.

"By the way—always in strict confidence, and you mustn't mind my asking. When you fell overboard it wasn't by—your own act, eh?"

"No. It was sheer accident."

There was no hesitation. The answer was given with prompt decisiveness.

"Ah! Now look here, Selmin, I'm going to try to clear the air for you with regard to this business, and I'm pretty confident I'm going to succeed. But I propose to start in with a little moralising. Half the misery in this world is unnecessarily caused by people allowing an alarmed and unrestrained imagina

tion to overcome their reason. A certain thing comes into being as a suggestion which may, or may not become an accomplished fact, but whether it does become so, or whether it doesn't, the result is the same; at once imagination begins to run riot, the horribilities of life are conjured up with a vehemence which reason under other circumstances would scorn to admit as possessing a shred of possibility. Do you follow me so far?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, then. Life for the time being is in a state of purgatory—a state of hell, rather—a state depending on the flimsy grounds of a frenzied imagination. In this case the mind takes possession of the body, tortures it with the studied cruelty of the Spanish Inquisition, scathes it with the red hot iron of misery, and in the end; unless the attempt is successfully made to throw off the thraldom, everything is involved in ruin. Now this attempt I want you to make, and I know you can do it successfully."

Selmin bent his head gravely.

"You're talking sound sense," he said. "Go on."

"I will. Now we'll get to the facts, and then I think that you'll feel as confident as I do that you're perfectly safe. You take this poor little beast out of the trap, and it bites you, only in fear, mind, not in rage. On your own showing it is so small as not to have passed the early stage of babyhood. It is practically impossible that it should have been rabid then. Well, you make a considerable pet of it, and have it often with you; watch it grow, and still it shows no sign, and that for three or four months—four

was it? Well, that's better still. If it was suffering from rabies when it bit you, the symptoms would have come out in it and in you long ago. If it only contracted them lately, which must have been the case; though how it managed to the Lord only knows, for rabies have been non-existent in England for some time past, why, then, you are not affected at all."

"That's pretty much what Durward said."

"Well, he was right. Yet one can't say he was wrong in advising you to put yourself on the safe side. But the fates have intervened, and now, instead of going to Pasteur's, here you are—snug and safe, and with absolutely nothing the matter with you. You may take my word for that."

The confident cheerfulness of the speaker's tone carried conviction, complete and irresistible conviction. Enscott had staked his whole throw on the policy of absolute, unhesitating, unqualified confidence, and—he had won. The clearance of Selmin's face, his next words, abundantly demonstrated that.

"You have steered me out of the Valley of the Shadow, Enscott," he said. "You can have no conception of what life has spelt to me since the discovery was made; why, it wouldn't have been wonderful if the conjecture you let fall just now had been correct, except that I should have chosen some swifter and surer means, if only that I am too much at home in the water to use it as a means of 'going out.'"

"I should rather say you were," laughed Enscott, "considering the time you must have managed

to keep yourself afloat when we picked you up, and that in heavy clothes and fairly ditto boots."

"And, you are quite sure about——?"

"Sure? Shall I trot out the old chestnut as to 'staking one's professional reputation, etc.?' But self-concentration, brooding, plays the very devil with anybody, Selmin. An appeal to common sense is the only way to deal with many of the difficulties in life even when these are real, but how much more so is this necessary under circumstances in which they are imaginary? Now throw off the last shade of your forebodings and start in to enjoy life, remembering only the nightmare as a visionary shadow which a puff of common sense dispersed as quickly as the air disposes a puff from your pipe.

"Talking of which, light up yours now, likewise fill up again," pushing the whisky and syphon across to him.

"Nightmare, indeed!" assented the other, sparkling up his glass. "Well, I'm going to take your dictum for it, Enscott, absolutely and unreservedly."

"And so you can. Think how you'll laugh at it all when we're having that jolly time together at Selmingfold when I get some shore leave—for I'm going to take you at your word, I can tell you."

"I should rather think you were," was the answer. And then the conversation got round to Lauretta and her visit there, and the captain, and if Enscott's quick perceptions led him into more than a suspicion that, with regard to the topic of the former, Selmin was more than once and of set purpose, harking back, why the idea was certainly not an unwelcome one.

"I tell you what it is, Selmin," he said suddenly. "Why not make up your mind to go the round trip with us? It would be the very best thing in the world for you just now especially, and you could get what outfit you were in immediate need of when we put in at the Cape. A little cabling would straighten things out in other ways, and even if it didn't, for lack of time, why that needn't matter."

Selmin thought a moment. The best thing in the world for him, the other had said. He had not read any special meaning into the words, but to his own mind they seemed to. In two or three days he would have to part from this useful friend, whose cheerful, downright, professional confidence was the very best medicine for him at this juncture. Perhaps, too, some vague, uneasy lingering, far at the back of his mind, may have warned him that were he to cut himself adrift and go among strangers once more, something of the nightmare might return. And, this man was Lauretta's brother, into the bargain."

"I believe you're right, Enscott," he said. "I believe the complete voyage would be an excellent thing for me. If we can manage to fix up other matters I'll go right on with you."

"That's capital," cried the other, heartily. "Oh, 'other matters' are easily enough fixed up, never fear. Let's have another 'peg,' Selmin, and go for a step on deck before turning in."

The night was fine, and cloudless. There was no moon, but the great stars hung literally in clusters, gleaming, twinkling, in the dark velvet as they can

only do in those latitudes and especially over the sea. There was a swell on, not a heavy one, but as the big ship sheared through it with a soft rush, her great funnel, and masts and spars, seemed to be raking wildly against the gold-spangled vault. The decks were deserted, and here and there an electric globe at intervals afforded all the light there was.

"This boat's the devil to roll," remarked Enscott. "When we got that dusting coming down the Bay she pretty nearly dipped her yards every time. Now, there's no swell to speak of, but if you watch her rigging against the sky it gives you the idea that she's bucking like blazes".

"It certainly does that," assented Selmin. "She seems to have too much top-hamper on her with all these tiers of decks. She's quite a new boat, isn't she?"

"Yes. This is her second trip."

"Well, she's a devilish comfortable one anyway, as good in that line as any I've ever been on board of."

"She's all that," agreed the other. And then they took up their walk and fell to talking about other things, and yet somehow or other the talk would veer round to Selmingfold, and—Lauretta.

More and more with the other beside him, was Selmin conscious of the lifting of a whelming weight. He would take this trip, would possess his soul in patience and return, safe, reassured, and, with good reason to suppose, to a life of happiness. And when finally he went to his cabin it was with a mind thoroughly at peace. The cloud had fallen from it.

It would be impossible to limit the intensity of the relief which had come upon him. For nearly a month now—it might have seemed a year—there had hardly been a moment, except when he was unconscious, that this ghastly potentiality had not been in his thoughts, that in everything he had not dreaded to detect a "symptom." Life before him had spread out a vista as of a terrestrial paradise. And then this dreadful thing had fallen upon him and life had become a martrydom. But the strong common sense of one man had come to his aid and had dispersed the cloud to the four winds.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAIF.

THE captain, on the bridge, seized the rail with both hands, and hung on for all he was worth. So also did the chief officer on the other side. Showers of spray drenched their oilskins and sou' westers, blinding their eyes. The *Tangipaho* was plunging wildly in the trough, and ever and anon a huge sea thundered over her main decks, and already every form of detachable gear on the said lower decks had been carried overboard. For something had gone wrong with her starboard propeller, and she answered but indifferently to her steerage way.

"This is going to be the worst south-easter I ever was in," went on the captain, his voice with difficulty penetrating the yell and bellow of the gale. The sky when visible through the driven spume, was inky in parts, leaden in others, and the lash of the furious gale threw mountainous seas upon the partly disabled steamer. The bridge was too high to be swept by the waves, but the ship lay over at such an angle that did these two once relax their grasp, they would be shot incontinently overboard.

In the glooming twilight the gigantic waves looked more mountainous still. In fact they looked about as terrific as can be imagined. Each mountainous crash against the ship's side seemed as though it must shiver the great steel fabric to splinters. It did not do this, but it heeled her over at a greater and even more apparently dangerous angle every time. Even from the height of the bridge and the boat deck it was difficult to command a view for any distance over the summits of each enormous wave, and the *Tangipaho* did not rise well, did not rise buoyantly. Both the captain and chief officer were watching her behaviour closely—not to say, by this time, anxiously. Then they would look aloft, look intently and long. The masts seemed to be raking the sky from one horizon to another. To leeward they seemed to dip beneath it. Away on the port beam, some three miles to windward, a white, red-funnelled, Union-Castle steamer, steering north-west, was now and then glimpsed through the masses of foam smoother when the *Tangipaho* was heaved up on an extra monstrous wave, then it grew dark, and she was blotted from sight.

With darkness, so far from moderating, the gale increased. The great ship seemed to be literally running upon her side like a racing yacht. Every mountainous sea that hit her, seemed to heel her over till the scuppers were deep awash, and before she could recover, a vaster mountain still would nearly overwhelm her, pouring, as it seemed, half the Atlantic Ocean over her lower decks. And the yell and shriek and bellow of the wind, and the thunder roar

of the mountainous surges seemed to render it difficult to realise that each heavy roll, each dead, unbuoyant lay over, would not be the last.

Below, in the saloon, things had reached the stage of a very inferno. The deadlights were on, the doors of the companion way securely battened, and all these people were shut up—as one idiot of a male and panicky passenger, by way of encouraging the female ones, put it—like rats in a trap. Incidentally, another, who *had* his share of level-headedness and common sense, asked him with more than one hard expletive—*sotto voce*—whether he thought that the women ought to be allowed on deck to be swept overboard then and there. But about all, even the sea-sick ones, yielding to a natural gregariousness in time of common peril, had gathered together in the saloon. But each nasty, coffin-like roll had thrown them off their feet, and more than one was moaning from the pain of a bad bruise, perhaps mercifully so, to deaden the effect of wild terror. Among these Enscott and the purser moved, with cheering words and practical advice, urging them to keep seated on the sofa lounges, and not to loose their hold of the brass hand rails, whenever another roll began.

These rolls, by the way, were becoming more frequent, and—*lasted longer*. The floor of the saloon became a confused heap of struggling, terrified women, unable to keep their balance on the sofas, and of would-be succouring men, for the most part, but for purely physical reasons, unable to keep theirs. Then wild shrieking began to arise.

"We are going down! God help us! We are going down!"

A deafening thunder crash on the side of the ship. As she lay over there was a tumbling, heaving mass of humanity shot almost against the lee scuttles.

"Good God, Atlay!" muttered Enscott, between his teeth to the purser. "Can't we do something with them all? Get the steward to serve out drink, or something. Anything better than this."

"I'm with you, doctor," struck in a bronzed-faced Colonial who had been rendering first aid. "I'll get anything if I know where to go."

But the terrific crashes of glass and crockery which had accompanied the awful tumult had been such that, on investigation, it proved that hardly anything remained within reach. The bar, the steward's pantry, were in such a state that short of getting your feet cut to pieces you could not have crossed the floor. Liquor of all sorts was swishing about the room, all mixed in a disgusting mess. But there were lockers, and these, with care, they managed to get at. Already a couple of stewards were requisitioning the doctor by reason of bad glass cuts.

A peril that you can only *hear* is of course far worse than one you can also see, hence the rat-in-a-trap idea. Selmin, having a deck cabin, was out of all this panic and turmoil. But even he felt far from easy. The ship was lying over at an alarming angle and she seemed to take quite a sickening time to right herself, he was thinking. He judged it

expedient to go out on deck, but from his window he watched the sea leap up, and strike the high deck on which his cabin was situated and rush in. But he was on the lee side. He remembered the remark let drop by Enscott as to the rolling capacities of this particular craft. Well, she was amply justifying it. It was all he could do to keep his feet anywhere, hang he on never so hard and fast. He remembered, too, that it was only yesterday that that conversation had been held which had lifted a most terrible load from his mind. By to-morrow evening they would have brought up in Table Bay, and now here they were, driving out into the Atlantic, partly disabled. Well, well. That was all in the day's work, but he did not like that dead heel over, well-nigh at an angle of forty-five. He would have liked it still less had he known that those on the bridge did not like it either.

Through the roar and pounding of the seas and the yelling of the gale came the hundred and one sounds telling of internal disturbance, the clang of metal, and the clatter and crash of wooden gear upon the deck. Then, as he looked forth, came the crowning crash of all. The sea boiled up to his cabin door as an enormous cascade of green water fell over from the upper deck. At the same time three boats slung in on chocks opposite his window were torn away like matchwood and vanished into the darkness. Then, from below, though partly deadened, came the most appalling shrieks from panic-possessed women.

Now for the first time he began to feel alarmed;

really, seriously alarmed. He turned back into his cabin, and turned on the electric light. But no light came. He groped then. In the almost darkness, for the globes outside were hardly burning at all, he found a lifebelt which was always stowed over his trunk. He likewise found a bottle and a flask. The latter, still groping, he filled, and put in his pocket.

Another of those dreadful lurches. More shrieks from below, more clatter above, but not so much if only that there was hardly anything left to clatter. Selmin, holding on first to his doorway, and waiting for the partial righting to come, then down the deck to the taffrail, in the very place whence one of the boats had been carried. His one idea—not a confused one, either—was to be somewhere so as to be clear of whatever was going to happen. For that something was going to happen he was as convinced as that he stood there.

He gripped the bulwark rails, now that he was in the open, feeling half stunned, half stupefied amid the bellowing of the tempest and the deluges of green water which dashed over him. Came another pouring cascade from the deck above. Came another rush of water from under such as had wrenched the boat away like a plaything. Still he held on, though his muscles were cracking. And now as he looked, the window of his own cabin *was forming a very ceiling above his head.* Then he let go.

In the dark and roar of the night, the mighty billow swept him onward with the velocity of a mill race—onward in the middle of the lone sea, raging and

mountainous with gale-tossed billows. But now the lifebelt was everything. He need hardly undertake exertion at all. He was conscious even of a feeling of soothed reaction as he rose and fell on the crest of the mountainous wave. The lights of the ship were distant now. Strange to say, he made no effort at a hail.

And then, and then he saw something. The lights seemed to rise up at him, turn towards him perpendicularly, then disappear. She had foundered.

And he was alone on the surface of the Atlantic, just as he had been alone on the surface of mid-Channel. But here the track of shipping was not a populous one.

But had she foundered? As he came up on the crest of the wave, his eyes, straining through the gloom, thought to detect a dark object where she had been. But there were no lights.

Then one came, in shape of a great globe, like a ball, and with it a dull, heavy roar, like the explosion of a volcanic eruption. Again the red fire globe showed, but more dimly, and with it another detonation, then darkness again, and the shriek and bellow of the gale, and the surge and roar of the huge billows.

The ship had capsized, Selmin decided. His instinct had been accurate. But for it he would not have buckled on the lifebelt and made for the taff-rail. She had capsized and blown up, with every soul on board, and he, the one survivor, was afloat on the wide Atlantic and at midnight without so much as a plank or a spar under him.

The situation was dreadful enough, appalling;

even hopeless, one would think, and yet Selmin's mind began to take on a whimsical turn. Was he fated to spend life swimming about on this or that sea at midnight, through no seeking of his own—was one of them? It must be remembered that he had undergone acute mental suffering, and it may be that this had something to do with it. But in any case, strange to say, so far he had hardly begun to realise his own hopeless position, nor yet to feel compunction over those who had gone down in the great catastrophe. That would come. But at present he was only conscious of an easy, soothing feeling. The water was warm in these latitudes, and as he made no effort, and had on a lifebelt, and just let himself be carried along, there was no physical or exhausting effort involved.

The sea was warm in these latitudes. Yes. But there was another contingency collateral with that condition which he—for the present—had not begun to realise. And he was afloat without so much as a plank or a spar under him—*let alone a boat.*

How long he had already floated thus he hardly knew, but it seemed that the waves, if not abating in height, had ceased to break into the furious foam crests, which had been there before. The wind, too, seemed to have dropped somewhat. On the head of a wave it would be keen and cutting; down in the trough it was like being in a sheltered valley. And the water was warm. Once he descried a faint far-off glow which pointed to the lights of a passing ship, but she would be hull down or at any rate at such a distance that he would stand exactly as

much chance of capturing her attention as that of the King and Court or the President of Trades' Unions of the planet Mars.

Then something of a reaction set in, possibly a touch of chill began to strike, in spite of the warmness of the water. Selmin watched his opportunity while there was no spray flying, got out his flask and took a nip. The glow ran generously through his frame, and withal, bolstered up his sense of humour. He saw the comical side. He saw a man, only his head above water, floating on the wide Atlantic—God knew how many miles from land—taking a pull out of a homely and congenial flask, only concerned for the moment lest the screw stopper should slip through his fingers and drop to the bottom of the said Atlantic. Yes, it was comical, decidedly, and he remembered how he had often drilled into other people—Durward especially—who was at times lacking in it—what a saving grace was comprised in a sense of humour.

He saw something else—at that particular moment something which put the comical side of the situation to flight, and brought back tragedy. He saw something floating on the crest of another wave, which was rolling and roaring away from him. The dawn was just breaking now, and he had lost all count of how long he had been in the water, and what he saw, or could have sworn he saw, was not a derelict boat or wreckage, but the head of a human being.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DURWARD OF SELMINGFOLD.

DURWARD was at Selmingfold now—alone.

As the next of kin he had come there to take charge, but he had, as yet, made no application to have the death presumed of its former owner. For one thing, sufficient time had not gone by. The missing man might have been picked up by some outward-bound ship which put in nowhere, and thus have been outside all communication for months. Possibilities were proverbially limitless. But, taking one consideration with another the probabilities were that Durward had come to Selmingfold to stay.

More than a month had gone by since that first piece of news had appeared in the papers, and nothing more had transpired. Durward had gone over to Dieppe, in search of information, but there was none to be obtained. The Company's agents could add nothing to what had been already published. Selmin's luggage was there, and of this, subject to certain guarantees, Durward had been allowed to take possession. But, as regarded its

owner, he could get at nothing more than had been published in the newspapers. It was not an unprecedented case. Passengers had been known to disappear overboard in mid-Channel, sometimes of their own will and act. There it was, and there it was likely to remain.

Yet now that the very thing had come off, and not through his agency, as he had, under the influence of his lurid obsessed brain wave, intended, Durward was not happy, was not satisfied. For this curious complex machinery of a mind was torn two ways. He had a genuine affection for his relative, but the obsession came in. He ought to have owned Selmingfold, but the other did.

He missed that other every day during his charge of the place. He himself loved this beautiful country side and its surroundings. Did he order out one of the hunters and ride to the Crawshay and Clancehurst meet, at Warnington, or Arlington, or Coolhurst, or anywhere, Selmin's favourite mount standing in its loose box seemed to turn a reproachful look at him—at least, so he read it. No, the whole thing had missed fire.

He would salve his conscience, or his sense of honour, which amounts to the same thing, with the reflection that whatever had happened to his kinsman was outside accident, sheer outside accident. The damnable scheme which he had contrived had not come off, and now, sitting alone at Selmingfold, he was unfeignedly glad that it had not. But, indirectly, Selmin had lost his life owing to it. But for it, Selmin would not have crossed the Channel,

therefore would not have gone overboard. Then the same idea which had struck Lauretta Enscott's brother, several thousands of miles away, hit Durward. Had Selmin gone overboard of his own act, his mind worked up to such a nervous pitch that he had rushed to meet the lesser evil in immediate and comparatively easy death, rather than in an eventful and hideous one? That would come to the same thing, and Durward hated to think of it.

After all, why should he set such store on possessing Selmingfold? He was not a pauper. He could do well in his profession. He was interested in it, and was about to strike out in a specialising branch of it that appealed to him. Why then, should he let himself go on this obsession? Selmingfold was always open to him, at any time, day or night. Yes, as he sat alone in the old familiar "den" at Selmingfold, looking at an empty armchair opposite to him, he would gladly have seen his kinsman occupying it, safe and sound. But——

But—for what?

Since the reported disappearance of Selmin, Durward had seen something of the Enscotts, and for the first time in his life he had been really reached. This girl, from the time he had rescued her, had safely lowered her from the runaway horse, had taken possession of him. She did not know it, did not suspect it in the least, for Durward was one of those self-contained men you meet with occasionally, but quite outside the average. He gave no sign. He was content to be with her, to watch her, and the result of the latter process convinced him that she

was terribly distressed over the tragic disappearance of Selmin. But she had not given up hope.

"Surely he will be found, Dr. Durward?" she would say. "He must have been picked up. The Channel is so full of shipping, and I know he was a strong and powerful swimmer. Why, I remember he told me once, when we were talking about Laylock Pond, that anyone who *could* swim and was drowned deserved to be, that scarcely a finger's effort was enough to keep anybody's head above water. Well, surely he'll have carried that into practice until he was picked up. Father says the same thing."

And Durward had answered that there was a great deal in what she said and, in fact, that he himself was hoping just that very thing. But while the intimacy between them grew and deepened, he was not slow to perceive that it did so on one common ground, and that spelt Selmin.

Now nothing had been *said* between Selmin and herself, yet it would have been but for that telegram calling them away just at the psychological moment, and this Lauretta knew perfectly well. She knew, too, what her answer would have been, and when the news of his tragic disappearance had reached them it had come upon her with a stunning shock. But she hid the effect. It is a strange thing, but even then some curious psychical intuition had come upon her, even as she had told Durward, that he would be found, be rescued; and this it was that keyed her up. She steadily refused to believe she would never see him again. She *would* see him again, and when she did——?

All the sweet country side down there, round Chirol's Farm and Selmingfold came back; all the places they had been in together, all the roads they had bicycled or ridden over together, came back; the field and woodland paths they had threaded together; the open breeziness of the glorious Downs, all came back. She *knew*. She had known then. Now she *knew* still more clearly. And he was gone —and the best she could comfort herself with now, was—well, to hope for the best.

Of the cause which had taken him away, of course she had no idea. Durward was not going to enlighten her upon that, naturally. But it did not take Durward long to probe the situation, and, in probing it, to realise that, as far as she was concerned, he himself was nowhere.

Then he got sick of the whole thing—suddenly, savagely, sick of it. He would throw himself into his professional interests, he told himself, and forget all about everything and everybody; and for a time he did. Incidentally he brought off a delicate and kill-or-cure operation which sent him up miles high in professional estimation, and brought him a certain modicum of fame. Then he returned to Selmingfold.

Here he stood in as taking charge. He never by any chance by word or hint, let drop that he was there in any other capacity. To all enquirers he gave out cheerily that the Squire would sooner or later be back again. He would be sure to have been rescued, but it might be months before they could hear of him. Now Selmin, during his short reign, had made himself very popular with his tenants and other

dependents. His colonial experience had taught him, if he had wanted teaching, to treat people as man to man rather than from *de haut en bas*, and it carried a lot with these honest country folk. Consequently there was a sequence of enquiries as to the prospects of his return. All of which galled Durward.

And yet, even then, Durward was not pleased with the result of his schemes. Whatever happened to Selmin he was not responsible, he told himself. The thing had switched itself off into accident—sheer accident—on to an accidental track, so to say. And yet, and yet—. But for him would the other have been put in the circumstances under which such accident could happen?

Now that he had attained the object of his obsession, more and more did Durward realise that it was Dead Sea fruit. He tried to salve his regrets with the thought that he had not been directly instrumental in his disappearance, but that was too hollow; he was not such a fool as to overlook cause and effect. The kitten had been painlessly exterminated a few days after Selmin's departure, and Durward had buried it himself, cage and all, at least six feet beneath the surface. This matter was too deadly a one to run risks over, and he left nothing to chance.

As the days went by, and no news whatever came, more and more did he give up hope; for, strange to say, he was beginning almost to loathe the place. Why did he not shut it up and go and busy himself with his profession? Well, the fact that Selmingfold

held him with a strange fascination. He could not resist—he could not break loose from it. Well, he had gained nothing, if anything was certain, it was that.

One afternoon he found himself up on the Down; all unconsciously his steps were taking him to the spot whereon we first made his acquaintance, the brow of the chalk pit. It was a dull, bleak day, and the wind whistled cold and piercing at this exposed altitude. And when, having nearly completed the ascent, he looked up, a very real surprise awaited him. A figure was standing on the brow of the white cliff looking down, a female figure. And it was that of Lauretta Enscott.

She was dressed in black, and her face lacked its usual sparkle, in fact it was pale and sad. She was the least surprised of the two.

"No news, I suppose?" she said, the first greetings over. Durward shook his head.

"We must not give up hope," he answered. "He may have been picked up. We may hear any day."

She half turned away. Her eyes were moist, then welled over. She did not want the other to see, but of course he had seen.

"I can't help it," she said. "It's frightfully sad, and we've both felt it so much."

"Excuse my asking, but how did you get here?" broke in Durward.

"Oh, father and I are staying at Helmstone with some people, and I thought I'd like to see all this part again, so I took the train to Steynhurst and walked, by way of Canonbury Link. I should have

enjoyed it, only it brought back things so. I oughtn't to have come."

"You oughn't, and for another reason," said Durward. "I suppose you're alone?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the reason. It's very lonely up here for you to be wandering about by yourself."

"But I've often done it before."

"Yes; that was in summer, when there were more people about, and the days were lighter, but it's different at this time of year."

"Dr. Durward, I never knew till to-day what you saved me from that time when the horse bolted," she burst out suddenly. "Of course, it must have gone here, and now that explains a story that father overheard at Steynhurst about a dead horse having been found with a saddle and bridle on. Of course, too, I knew whose it was, but I had no idea of the precise locality. But for you I should have been carried over too, and dashed to pieces."

"I seem to have been in luck's way that day," said Durward, in a strange sort of voice.

"Believe me, I never realised the actual peril until just now. I thought I should have fallen off in the ordinary way. Of course, I had no idea of this ghastly place yawning just in front."

"Well, as I said before, I was in luck's way on that occasion. It isn't worth while saying any more about it."

Durward's tone was almost gruff, but he was thinking. He had effected her rescue from sure and certain death—he, not Selmin—and Selmin was to

have everything. Looking at her now, here on the bleak and wind-swept down, and her pale sad face, his compunction came perilously near extinction point, for he shrewdly guessed that its sadness was not due to grief for her relative lately deceased.

"I hope you'll allow me to order a trap from the inn at Warnington, and take you back to Steynhurst," he said. "You can't walk all that distance again, and besides, it'll be dark long before you get there."

"You are very good. But I don't know. It would bring things back so."

"But you were saying just now that you had walked out here on purpose to see this part again," he urged.

"Yes. I know; but being a female, I am bound to be inconsistent," she answered, with a faint smile. "Well, perhaps I have undertaken more than I can carry through, so I will avail myself of your kind offer."

The early light of a dark afternoon certainly was beginning to wane as they struck downwards. Nothing could be more studiedly considerate than Durward's manner at every turn, and Lauretta appreciated it.

"I suppose I could not persuade you and your father to come and relieve the solitude of a lonely man for a week or so?" he ventured, while the conveyance was being got ready.

"Oh—you are kind—but—not just now. You see, we are in mourning," she added, hurriedly.

Tactful as before, Durward accepted the excuse;

but watching her face keenly, while not seeming to do so, he knew full well her reason. Then the last shred of compunction went by the board: Time—the Great Healer! And then, and then! Even by virtue of his relationship with the one who was gone, might not his own cause triumph? But during the drive through the raw, misty, winter air, for only an open waggonette was available, he was consideration itself—tactful and sympathetic. And that drive to him was all too short.

But on his return from it, he looked out on a new side. Selmingfold was well worth having, after all.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOUR DAYS.

THE head on the wave crest had disappeared, down into the next water-valley. A great, breaking curl of foam deluged Selmin's face, but by dint of keeping his face turned from the wind he was able to minimise the effect. In fact, it was the foam of these wave crests broken off by the wind that caused him the most trouble. Now he began to swim, hitherto he had made no effort, had simply let himself go. Time enough to exert himself when there should be a demand for exertion. At present economise strength.

Down the great slope of one huge billow, then up the smooth hill of another. Ah! there was his quest. By manœuvring so as to shelter himself from the wind by the very screen of the water-wall he attained his object. The head was that of a living man, and in the pale dreary light of dawn he recognised it. It was that of Enscott. He emitted a hail.

Surely this was a strange meeting. Here were

these two, right out in the huge, gale-driven waves of the Atlantic, each with his head above water, and nothing else. Well, if it seems "tall," unlikely, there are many occurrences which happen on the face of the deep, and for the matter of that on the face of the earth, which never come to light, and are every whit as strange, or even more so.

Enscott turned a pale, exhausted face in answer to the hail. The great billow heaved them both up, and a stroke or two brought Selmin within reach of the other.

"Got a lifebelt on?" was his first query.

"No. Only a rotten little folding chair, but it helped to keep me up," was the gasping response. "I suppose only to prolong the agony, for I'm just about done. I was going to give up, when I heard you."

"Don't give up, Enscott. Remember the sterling sound sense of the advice you gave me, only the other day. Let's hold up as long as we can, and meanwhile I'm going to give you my lifebelt and take charge of your chair instead. You remember what you said when you picked me out of the Channel, that I must be an extra record swimmer. Well, I believe I am."

He was unbuckling his cork belt, and ranging alongside of the other, helping him in spite of his protests, to fasten it on. Then he grabbed hold of the chair.

"It's not much support," he said. "Still, I'm fairly fresh, and you're not. You can take a spell

of rest for a bit on the strength of all that cork. And you want it, too."

This was no more than the truth. Strong, powerful man as he was, and in the pink of condition, Enscott was not much of a swimmer. Indeed, but for Selmin's appearance on the scene it is highly probable that another ten minutes would have seen the last of him.

"Well, I'll use it for a time," he said. "Then we must change over again. I believe we are the only two left out of the whole crowd. I had got out of the saloon and was engineering myself along the main deck when there was a heave that seemed to catapult me into space. I grabbed hold of the nearest thing, which proved to be that chair. Then I found myself in the sea, and directly afterwards there was a boil, and heave up of the sea, and a tremendous concussion which rendered me half-senseless, but still I managed to hang on somehow. It's my belief, Selmin, that the *Tangipaho* turned turtle and her boilers exploded."

"That's my own opinion," was the answer. "And now we must keep a look-out for craft. We ought not to out of the track of shipping, and it's getting lighter. How are you feeling? Less fagged? Well, try a pull at this, only be careful not to let any sea water get into it."

He handed the other the brandy flask. Enscott took a medium pull, with great care as to not letting go the stopper.

"Yes. That's better," he said, handing it back, also with care. "The situation has its humorous

side. We two might be taking a swim off the beach at Helmstone, and yet here we are, practically in mid ocean, with nothing in sight. Funny, isn't it ? "

" Funny, yes. But I've known very funny things in my time, and people come through them all right. Well, we mustn't give out till the very last kick."

It was daylight now, but the sunrise did not show through the lowering murk of the heavens. However the sea had abated markedly, and though the waves were running mountainously they were longer, and the dull, olive-green valleys between each, smoother and more even ; nor were the crests now broken off in foamy suffocating smother. As they rose upon each, Selmin looked eagerly, keenly, for a sail, or a trail of smoke. None. From horizon to horizon nothing but the tumbling mass of sad green water. Then something caught his glance which set his nerves tingling. It was a light object some three or four hundred yards distant, rising and falling on the crest of the waves.

" I believe that's an overturned boat, Enscott," he said. " Yes. By the living Jingo, it is ! Well, it's better than a folding deck chair, anyhow. We'll get to it. No hurry, though. No need to exhaust ourselves. We'll take our time."

This they did, and in due course were alongside of the object, but even before they came up to it they could see it was even as Selmin had said. It was quite a small boat—a dinghy—and they could see at a glance it had not belonged to the *Tangipaho*.

" We are not the only victims of this most infernal

gale," said Selmin, as they clung on to the keel to rest. "This must have belonged to some tramp or insignificant sailing ship. Look, there's only a letter 'S' on her bows. Now we must try and right her, and then bale somehow or other, but what with?"

It was by no means easy to right the boat, especially on the slope of a wave running at an angle of thirty-five. And while they were engaged in the process, another and a new peril faced them—a peril which has already been hinted at, but one, which, somehow or other, both had overlooked—luckily, perhaps. For the deep is never uninhabited. Now a shape appeared, lying over on the slope of the wave, then another; long, cruel, torpedo-like shapes, in fact a couple of extra large blue-nose sharks.

Selmin, looking over his shoulder, was the first to sight them, and the effect was inspiring—in the wrong direction.

"Now, Enscott, let's give a heave both together. We must get this hooker right end up, and that sharp," he said. They managed it. The dinghy in response to a combined united effort, turned right side up. Neither had even so much as a hat or a cap to bale with, but Selmin managed to divest himself of his coat and by a deft bunching of it in a basin-shaped hollow to use that. Soon the gunwale of the boat rose a respectable number of inches above the surface.

"You get in now, Enscott," he said. "Over the stern, not by the gunwale or she'll capsize again. Then you can throw out the water easier."

But there came in a conflict in heroics. Enscott insisted that the other should get in first. Selmin waxed short.

"Do as I say," he urged. "We've no time to quarrel over precedence. I'll tell you why, directly."

Enscott had not yet described the new and grisly form of peril that threatened. But he was very exhausted, and yielded. The displacement of his body sent a large volume of water out of the boat, though for one moment it was toss up whether she would not capsize again. The sharks now were drawing in nearer, and Selmin was still in the sea.

"Bale, man. Bale for all you know," he urged, with a quick look over his shoulder. One of the brutes was actually making a rush for him. He kicked and splashed and shouted. Then Enscott, becoming alive to the situation, lent his voice to the intimidating tumult. The noise was effective. The grisly beast stayed in its rush, flicked its tail, and sailed slowly back again.

"Come on board, Selmin, it'll hold us both now," cried Enscott.

The coming on board was difficult, but Selmin managed it. Even then, with the additional weight the small craft nearly went under, but they baled as though their lives depended on it, as in fact they did, throwing out the water with their hollowed hands. For even as Selmin climbed into the boat, both the sharks came rushing forward, but a few seconds too late.

"Now you see where our need for hurry came in?"

he said. "Look at those two devils. We couldn't have stood them off for ever, and rotten as the position is, we're safe from *them* anyhow."

The other looked at the sharks, looked at the sea, then at his companion in adversity.

"You're a wonderful chap, Selmin, and that's a fact," he said. "You've got the nerve and readiness of ten, and, by God! but for you I should have been a 'goner' by now."

Selmin knew that this was no more than the truth. The other certainly was at his last kick when he had found him, and given him his own lifebelt; and the thought that this man whose life he had saved, so far, was Lauretta's brother was not a displeasing thought. But he answered:

"That's all right, old chap. But if it is as you say, well now we are quits. When you gave me that splendid advice the other day I might have been on the verge of mania or very near it. That saved the situation. So we are quits. Meanwhile, we are both in a damned awkward bungle. Here we are, in a small dinghy, adrift on the broad Atlantic, with no oars or sail, and not a drop or bite between us, except this flask. Rum fix, isn't it?"

Enscott did not immediately reply. He was eyeing his companion strangely. Then he said:

"You're rather a wonder, Selmin. We're in as desperate a corner as ever two men were in in their lives, and yet you sit there yarning as calmly as if you were at home in Selmingfold. Well, you're adding to my experience."

"Yes? Lots of people add to mine."

"For instance, if you don't mind my alluding to it, you were terribly perturbed over that other business."

"Quite right. But that was a lurking enemy, one so awful and ghastly that it wouldn't bear thinking of, one that might overwhelm you at any moment. I tell you, Enscott, that knocked the stuffing out of me and no mistake. And so, I thought, there was the element of certainty about that. This position is bad enough, but it contains the element of uncertainty, and that in our favour."

"Yes. There's a difference in that," said Enscott. "Hallo! The sun's coming out and a good thing too, for I'm beginning to feel shivery."

"Same here. What a difference a touch of sun does make."

The heavy murk of the sky had lightened, and now a shaft of light shot down upon the leaden seas. The boat, riding easily over the liquid mountains, was entirely at their mercy. There were no oars, no sail, nothing by which she could be steered, and these two waifs had only to sit there and watch the heaving, tumbling expanse. But as Selmin had said, there was all the element of uncertainty. Any sort of craft might appear at any moment; but, even then, a small boat is a very small object. And, as a matter of fact, one did heave in sight a couple of hours later.

She was apparently a barque-rigged ship, and was hull down on the horizon. They watched her with straining eyes. She was tacking to northward, and

one long tack took her out of sight, and the return one brought her back, but still hull down. They had no sort of appliance for signalling, and to shout was of course sheer waste of energy, for a ship, hull down and viewed from the surface of the sea, may be anything over five miles distant. Then she faded from view altogether.

"Sporting chance," said Selmin. "And—we haven't won."

The other said nothing. Perhaps the adventurous life that Selmin had led, and which *he* had not, had something to do with it, but Enscott, in spite of his cheery professional manner, was now feeling most terribly depressed. He strove to disguise it, but succeeded badly. Not that he complained or gave way to despondency; on the contrary, he did all he could to appear hopeful. It was now Selmin's turn to do the encouraging spirit. And this he did.

He talked of home matters. Of the time they had had at Selmingfold, of the time they would have, as he optimistically put it. He talked of Lauretta, and the old captain, and the dogs; of sport, of the lovely Down country, of everything, for all the world as if they were sitting in some West End club. And so the first day wore on, and finally shut down.

But now the cry of Nature began to make itself heard. Both men had undergone hard physical exertion, and it was getting on for twenty-four hours since they had dined on board the *Tangipaho*. In short, both of them had grown desperately hungry.

Of course, that was a state that was bound to come, and now that it had each was trying to hide it from the other. So far, they had been spared the agonies of thirst; the hours of soaking which both had undergone had probably contributed to that. The sun dropped, and the sky grew cloudy again. Not another sign of sail appeared, since the one that had tantalised them in the morning. The first day had passed.

"Well, we're dry, at any rate, and fairly warm," was Selmin's announcement, always optimistic. "Better luck to-morrow, perhaps."

In the night a ship passed them, a steamer, and a large one, judging from her pace and her lights. Both were dozing, but at sight of her they leapt up with such energy as nearly to capsize their small craft. She could not have been more than a couple of miles distant, as they set up such a shout in unison as—one would have thought—should have rent the world. But they might have spared themselves that expenditure of energy, especially as vocal energy has a tendency to thirst. She held on her way, as though a couple of castaways, face to face with a lingering, agonising death, had not been within easy view of her—in the daytime.

"Oh, good God!"

Enscott let fly the exclamation and sank back into the boat. The sea had gone down, and now was almost normal.

"Rotten, isn't it?" said the other. "Another sporting chance, and we've lost. But—we must

look on it from the sporting point of view, you know. Next time we may win."

"'Pon my soul, Selmin, you're a wonderful chap, as I said before," pronounced Enscott. "Now, how long do you reckon we can go on empty, I wonder? As a professional man, I ought to be able to make a guess, but—everyone's differently hung."

"Four days at the outside. I can speak for myself, because I've done it."

Then the speaker drowsed off. Hunger, exertion, had rendered him sleepy. Soon the first would have a very different effect.

The second day rose upon a smooth sea, but for a light swell. At any rate, the peril of mountainous waves was not with them. But, on the other hand, the sun shone clear and hot. This was a provocative to thirst.

Not a sight of sail or smoke. The hours wore on. Nothing. The sea might have been the desert sands of Sahara. And these two floated there in the tiny open boat on its world-wide expanse, without one particle of food, one drop of drink.

"How about our pipes, Enscott," said Selmin. "They ought to count."

"No," answered the other, "I never could smoke on an empty stomach. It makes me dead sick."

"Oh, I can. But there's devilish little 'bacca in my pouch. It's all dust. However, here goes."

In great emergencies men's characters do come out. In this emergency the characters of these men did come out. Both had the sporting instinct. There

was the natural comradeship in adversity that you get in men. Here they were thrown together, and each was bent on—well, not making the best of the situation, because there was precious little "best" to be made of it; but, at any rate, not the worst. Which in a difficulty is a great thing.

"I believe my stuff will want drying, after submersion," went on Selmin, examining his tobacco pouch. Then he spread it out over the thwarts of the boat in the sun in the most matter of fact way.

The real truth of it was that he was doing everything now with the view of keeping the dread situation in the background. Here the hardened, resourceful adventurer came in, and, as is frequently the case, the resourceful side took a mental side too. For the up-countryman is quick to think. He learns to be. Hard, tight situations teach him to be. Wherefore Selmin of Selmingfold might be one man at Selmingfold, and quite another cast away in a small open boat on the Atlantic, without a scrap of food or a drop of drink on board. Now, all of a sudden, he burst out laughing. Enscott stared.

"What a jackass I am," he went on. "I'd clean forgotten my matches would be soaked to pulp. However, let's see."

He took out a silver box. The vestas were certainly limp, but the tightly-shutting lid had partially protected them. By spreading them out in the sun, they too might soon dry. And this, in fact, they did.

"Won't you try the remedy, Enscott?" went on Selmin, puffing away contentedly at his pipe.

"Oh, no, no. It'd make me as sick as a dog. Besides, it conduces to thirst. If we could only capture some of these flying fish," he went on, with a veritably wolfish gaze at the silvery, bird-like creatures skimming the crests of the waves. But this they could not do, and after many attempts, they gave it up. The second day passed.

"We look a brace of holy scarecrows, and no mistake," said Selmin, with a ghastly attempt at mirth, as the dawn of the third day saw them looking at each other from under their coats, which they had drawn over their heads to protect them from the night chill and the sun by day. Enscott laughed, in equally half-hearted fashion. The two were feeling very languid, very weary and faint with hunger—and now thirst was more than beginning to supervene. Neither now had sufficient energy to try and forget things by conversation. The triangular fin of a shark moved along the surface at a distance of only about a hundred yards.

"That devil's going to get us, and he knows it," said Enscott, wearily.

"Oh, he may not," was the answer; but the note of encouragement was lacking now. The hours wore on. Once a dark haze on the horizon started them up gazing, but if it was the smoke of a steamer, it was at such a distance as to tantalise them once again with the cruelty of the last hope gone.

For it was almost the last hope. They had calculated they were drifting southward, and more

and more out of the track of everything. And they could not hold out for ever, not probably for another day.

"Well, I'm going to try the effect of leather," said Selmin. "It's a dodge I've read about, and there might be something in it."

"So there might," assented the other.

The third day went down upon two men seated opposite each other in the boat, each masticating a portion of one of his shoes.

The fourth day dawned. No sign. The same hopeless Sahara-like expanse of water, the same striking down heat as the sun rose higher and higher. Neither spoke now—or if they did it was in monosyllables, and that rarely. For there was one thing they had overlooked. The shoes they had been chewing to alleviate in some degree the pangs of hunger had been soaked for many hours in the sea, and the leather had assimilated the brine. Now they were suffering intolerable torment from thirst.

Now to one of them came the thought of a circular pool fringed with green rushes, and that water his property! All the water he owned as his property! Heavens! Why, it seemed he would have given the whole of that property for a few gallons of the contents of that circular pool alone. And the weird, undefinable stirring of the waters! That had occurred to him before. Well, of a truth that superstition was borne out. And yet—and yet—— When it had occurred to him before—floating in

mid-Channel, there had come rescue. And now——?

The fourth day closed down—closed down upon two haggard-faced, wild-eyed men, each with his lips glued to his own forearm, sucking eagerly at an opened vein, in the effort to save life by draining his own life-stream. Thus the fourth day. Would there be a fifth—for them?

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEWS—FOR THREE.

LAURETTA felt very kindly towards Durward after he had put her into the train at Steynhurst. He had been so thoughtful and considerate and sympathetic during their drive, and he was the nearest relative and friend of Selmin. She had, in a subdued sort of way, almost enjoyed that longish and cold drive through the dark afternoon, and their conversation together. It seemed as if Durward understood: and yet between herself and the missing man nothing had been actually *said*.

She sat in the corner of her compartment thinking, and her thoughts were sad. She could see dimly the stripe of road skirting the line, which she and Selmin had traversed together on the bicycle one lovely summer's day, and on the other side the broad surface of the tidal estuary. And she felt sadder still. Why had she come on that expedition this afternoon? Why go over all the ground again?

The train pulled up at Beacham Junction. The old square Norman tower of the church stood out

against the now dark sky beyond, but just then something caught Lauretta's glance—something that sent night effects and other thoughts to the right-about. A line of posters hung along the station bookstall, which the clerk in charge was even then closing—

"THE MISSING LINER."

So ran one heading. She had not seen the morning papers, and the notice had no immediate interest for her. But on the next board was something that started her very much alert indeed. This was it—

"FEARED LOSS OF THE 'TANGIPAHO.'"

The *Tangipaho!* The ship of which her brother was surgeon! In her eagerness to get out, Lauretta was turning the handle the wrong way, when a porter came to her aid.

"I want the evening papers—*all* the evening papers, please," she said hurriedly, to the bookstall man. He, for his part, looked not best pleased, for was he not shutting up shop at the close of his day's wage-earning?

"Well, I haven't got 'em all, miss. Sold out of some of 'em," he answered. However, he got out a few, and Lauretta, handing him her purse, for her hands were trembling too much to get out coins, seized the bundle. The man looked at her strangely as he returned it, and drew his own conclusions.

"Is it about the liner, miss?" he said, kindly. "Well, don't put overmuch weight on that. Our evening papers all go in for 'scare headlines,' to sell.

Your train'll be off in a minute, miss. You'd better get in."

It had been a standing joke between herself and Selmin that a train pulling up at Beacham Junction might have stood there for dining purposes, but now she had only just time to scurry back. Then, as the door was slammed to, she dropped into her corner and tore open the papers. But the lighting, as usual, was villainous. Lauretta stamped an angry foot, and rising, stood right under the miserable, uncleaned, gnat-choked lamp. She had the compartment to herself.

Ah, here was something—

"REPORTED LOSS OF A LINER.

"The ss. *Tangipaho,* from London to Auckland, New Zealand, and due in Table Bay on the 17th, is now six days overdue. She was sighted last by the Union-Castle liner *Bomvana* only a day and a-half before she was due to arrive. It is feared that she may have broken down in the gale that arose on the night of the 17th, and be drifting helplessly out into the Atlantic. The cruiser *Wolf* has been despatched from Simonstown in search of her. The gale was one of the most terrific ever known on this coast, and many ships are overdue, while two are known to have foundered."

This was cheerful. Standing there in the abominably lighted, mustily upholstered third-class compartment, it seemed to Lauretta that all the surroundings were in keeping. She tore open another paper. The account in this was substantially the

same, except that it appended that the rolling of the *Tangipaho* had appeared abnormal. Then Lauretta remembered the bookstall's clerk's remark as to the scare headlines for selling purposes, and it brought a modicum of comfort. Why, the *Tangipaho* was a large, well-found, powerful ship, with twin screws. She remembered how elate her brother had been on the subject of his appointment to her. No. She had possibly broken down, but it was utterly impossible she could have come to disaster.

Then a dismal idea struck her. Was everyone to be swallowed up by that cruel, relentless sea? First one, now another. But that dreadfully lighted, musty compartment was calculated to foment and foster dismal ideas in anybody.

Arriving at Helmstone she bought more evening papers, but they seemed to contain no later news. She walked back swiftly to where they were staying Her father, at any rate, would be an authority on a point of this sort. But on the front she ran against a fresh batch of newspaper sellers, yelling raucously!

"Hextry speshawl! 'Orrible shipwreck. Liner sunk—off the Cape—with all 'ands! Hextry speshawl! 'Orrible shipwreck!"

Incidentally this is the sort of thing that the well-earned evening rest of the peaceable British citizen is allowed to be disturbed with, even if the bawl were true.

She found her father, also with a pile of evening papers around him.

"What do you think of it?" she said. "You know all about—that sort of thing."

"Why, just this, dear. We must hope for the best. That sounds like a sort of cant, but in this case there's a lot in it. An overdue ship is one thing, a missing ship is another. But this isn't a missing ship by any means, in the Lloyd sense of the term. She's only overdue by six days. Overdue. Well, of course, with a steamer, that corresponds to about a couple of weeks or three, in the case of a sailing vessel. But there are plenty of instances of overdue ships, and even missing ships, turning up again, and in this case her machinery may have broken down and she may have drifted. But the papers say they've sent a cruiser out from Simonstown to look for her. No. We needn't be 'down' about it, not yet."

Those last two words rather spoilt the whole effect. Her father's hopefulness had cheered Lauretta immeasurably. She was devotedly fond of her only brother, and now there was a sort of unconscious despondency in the tone in which her father had spoken those two words. And he had been a seaman all his life. She remembered, too, how he had sometimes said, in the course of some reminiscence at a cosy fireside, how little passengers knew of the risks they had run, and that in pretty nearly every voyage. And now he, too, was despondent, the tone of the last two words had given that away.

"I think, father," she said, "we'd better go back home. We're no good to other people under these circumstances. Besides, we shall be nearer to the centres of information."

To this the captain thoroughly agreed. He was

more anxious than he wanted her to know. So the next day he broke it to their hosts. And the next day brought out fresh scare lines on the newspaper posters as to the reported loss of the *Tangipaho*, and the "pars" relating to it were increasingly gloomy. The old man, as a matter of fact, was as upset and anxious as Lauretta herself. He knew the perils and contingencies of the sea, and she did not; and this was his only son. He knew the list of "missing" ships which had simply disappeared from mortal view, from mortal knowledge, for ever. He knew that his knowledge on the subject could have curdled the blood of many of his passengers in his seagoing days had he chosen to impart them, which, of course, he never had. Passengers were skeery enough, he would say, and on the strength of it, one of his "fads"—for want of a better word—had been to more than hint to his officers to draw in at spinning sea yarns to passengers.

"But, mind this, dear," he went on. "We must keep up our hearts, for, as I tell you, in my experience, the most hopeless cases have turned out all right in the end. The sea is always the sea, and that spells a great big gambling chance. Why, I remember the case of the—" and then he went on to give quite a formidable list of breakdowns and casualties. "Well, they came right or partly so. Why shouldn't this?"

By a conjunction of ideas more than ever that night did Lauretta dwell upon the disappearance of Selmin. Here were both of them gone. She recalled that cloudless morning when she had been standing with him just in front of the house at

Selmingfold with the dogs, and the little fluffy kitten playing at their feet, and the green golden roll of the country sweeping away in front, under the radiancy of the summer sky, when they were planning the moonlight picnic, and all had seemed so fair and undimmed. And then, suddenly, had come the telegram. Was there nothing but bereavement? It seemed so.

Durward, after seeing Lauretta off at Steynhurst, got into the trap for his cold, dark, homeward ride, with a feeling of elation he could hardly repress. He had fancied the girl was sympathetic to him in her manner. Well, he had the field to himself now, and after all, in this world one had to look after oneself. He had intimated that he often went into Helmstone, and would like to call, and she had gladly responded to the suggestion. Perhaps, after all, she had not been so much impressed by the other as he had thought, and now by a sort of instinct he felt himself secure in his possession. He lit his pipe, and a glow of warmth and satisfaction suffused his frame, as he was wheeled along the dark, tree-hung, dripping roads. Patience—that was the word. No need for hurry. And then would come before him a vision of Selmingfold in the future; Selmingfold—light, bright, cheerful with voices, and then he would have nothing left to wish for. Already the vision of the man who had gone out to his death in the dark waters had begun to fade. A brighter, fairer vision had taken its place.

He sat alone after dinner, feeling very content,

very snug. He had brought a couple of evening papers out from Steynhurst, and now it occurred to him to look at these. He had glanced through the first, and was just tossing it aside when something caught his eye.

The *Tangipaho.*

He read the account of the disappearance of the ship. It was one of those dread tragedies of the sea which occurs from time to time, but to him it conveyed nothing specially or personally significant. And then—all of a sudden it did.

The name seemed to stare forth in him from the news sheet, seemed to stand out in its lettering. Why?

Durward's brows contracted, as he thought—thought hard. What was there about it that seemed to hold him? And then all of a sudden, and in a flash, it struck him, came back to him. This was the ship on which Captain Enscott's son was serving as surgeon. He had heard them mention it.

Wide awake now, for he had been growing drowsy, he went through the paragraph again, then turned to the other paper for its version. The two were substantially alike, and now it struck him, that if this were true, it would postpone his relations with mourning the loss of an only brother it would be Lauretta for quite an indefinite time. If she were in the highest degree untimely for him to try and improve his chances, and that for some while to come. "Had anyone ever such luck?" he asked himself bitterly.

He thought again, and thought hard. Was that

the name of the ship after all, or was it something like it? Now a doubt seemed to creep in and he literally cudgelled his brains. These confounded outlandish native names had a certain family likeness to each other. People had no business to name ships by them. Nobody could pronounce them—correctly, at any rate. Well, to-morrow there would be later news, and he must possess his soul in patience until then.

He wondered if Lauretta had seen the papers. They had rather shaved the train at Steynhurst, and it would certainly have been upon the posters; as it was, they had had no time to glance at anything. If she had not, should he go into Helmstone to-morrow and see her—and he very much wanted to see her again. He could pretend he had been obliged to come in on business, and thought he might as well take the opportunity of calling. And perhaps it might not be the same ship, after all.

Durward felt extraordinarily, unaccountably restless. It was of no use going to bed, nor did he feel in the least inclined to read. Getting up from his chair he went out into the hall, and putting on an overcoat and lighting a fresh pipe, opened the front door. The murk of the afternoon had cleared, and now the loom of the Downs rose against clear starlight. He paced down the garden walk, and took the path towards the coverts. The dogs, kennelled behind old Dayson's cottage, woke up, and began to signal their consciousness of his presence by vehement baying. He struck downward. The gloom of the covert path shut him in, but that mattered nothing;

his sight was of the best, and he was not unaccustomed to the dark.

Now, in the solemn stillness of the night woods, things came back to him, and somehow or other the thoughts of Selmin became predominant ; Heaven only knew what curious psychic twist associated the thought of him with the reported loss of the *Tangipaho,* but most certainly something did. Durward was not given to nerviness; on the contrary, no more strong-nerved man ever lived; but, somehow to-night he seemed to feel the presence of Selmin with him. Even then the idea conveyed no sense of scare, but it did convey another sense, the sense of potential shattering of his rose-coloured prospects. Durward, a scientific man himself, scoffed at nothing. " You never can tell," was one of his favourite axioms. What if Selmin were alive, and should return again ?

Then the oft-repeated—not so often of late, though—uneasiness came over him. If Selmin were dead he had been the cause of his death—indirectly, but still the cause. Yet, why should he have been ? Hundreds of people crossed the Channel every night, every day, yet they didn't fall overboard. But against this came the suspicion that had hit his brother medicine man, thousands of miles away. Was this an accident or the result of a mind unhinged by a terrible and brooding idea ?

The night was lovely, soothing, and he was well wrapped up. Durward would fain have prolonged his ramble, but the thought that they would be wanting to lock up the house brought him back,

Owls were hooting softly over the fir coverts, and the distant bark of a fox echoed up from beyond Laylock Pond. He did not want to go in, but he went.

The next day he went into Helmstone.

"Captain Enscott in?"

"No, sir," answered the servant. "The captain and Miss Enscott went back to London first thing this morning."

"Oh!"

"I'm afraid, sir, they had some bad news," went on the smart, rather pretty, servant girl; perhaps, with the intuition of her sex, reading off the inflection of the one syllable in conjunction with the outward appearance of the caller. "They had several telegrams, and—it made a difference."

"Oh, yes. Yes, thanks."

Durward went down the front steps more disappointed than he wanted to allow. Clearly they had heard the news, and the name of the ship was the correct one. That meant that his chances were set back for months—or more.

But he had Selmingfold.

CHAPTER XXX.

DURWARD'S PROPHECY.

In their pretty villa at Chislehurst, surrounded by everything in the way of comfort and refinement on a modest scale, Captain Enscott and his daughter sat and waited and hoped. The former had a friend in a high position at Lloyd's, who had promised to keep him up to the very latest—if there was any more "latest," that is—with regard to the missing *Tangipaho*. But there *was* no "latest." The days went by, and not a word. She had simply disappeared from human ken, had disappeared out of the world.

The ship which had last sighted her before darkness closed down, his friend told him, had logged that she did not seem to be making good sea way, but otherwise there had been nothing so abnormally wrong about her movements; and, after all, they had only sighted her at a considerable distance. But as day followed day, and no further news came, the poor old captain got more and more into stages of despondency and grief. He knew, none better,

he declared, that a steamship due in Table Bay in a little over twenty-four hours—that had been sighted and spoken at that distance from her port, and now for twelve days nothing had been seen or heard or traced of her, and that in one of the most violent gales ever remembered on the coast, why, there was something altogether wrong. It was of no use to talk about "hoping for the best" and all that. He knew.

The twelve days had doubled themselves. Hourly the friend at Lloyd's was answering prepaid wires, and the answer always a negative.

Twenty-four days overdue when twenty-four hours from port. Here the old man's sea experience tended to the reverse of encouragement. He mourned his only son as lost.

"Well, well, I've used the sea all my life," he would say, with infinite sadness, "and this boy is swallowed up by it in the beginning of his." The "boy," incidentally, was about five and thirty.

Lauretta tried to hope against hope; but she, too, gave way. It was clear that there was none. There was one thing, however, that the friend at Lloyd's pointed out to them. The *Tangipaho* had left no trace. It was the rarest thing for that to happen. No wreckage whatever, which remained from her, had come to life. None had been found by passing ships, nor had been washed ashore. Now, a vessel foundering as near land as she had done—if she had —would be bound to shed a quantity of deck gear, not to say a boat or two. Well, nothing belonging to her had been picked up. The cruiser which had been sent in search had discovered nothing. That

looked as if she had simply drifted out of the track of shipping, and in that case she would be still afloat. In that case, too, even if she were seriously disabled, she would drift on into the track of shipping again, and would inevitably be sighted sooner or later. But it was poor comfort. Old Enscott recalled other instances of missing ships which had disappeared and left absolutely no trace either, and this one was more than three weeks overdue, in these days of powerful steam, too. No, there was no hope. He mourned his son as one dead.

Durward had called to offer his sympathy, his condolences, and he had done it tactfully and well. Instinctively the old man had taken a liking for Durward, perhaps partly because he was in the same profession as his lost son, also it may be that he brought with him a recollection of Selmingfold, where they had all been so happy together. Partly, too, for Durward's own sake, for whatever his shortcomings he was a very likeable man. He had called again, more than once, and could easily see that he was welcome. Then, delicately, he contrived to suggest that they should come down to Selmingfold and make a stay with him.

"It will do you good, captain," he urged. "It will do you both good, and you will be quite quiet there. Of course, I am only in charge, only keeping the place warm, so to say, against Selmin's return."

Here Lauretta looked up quickly.

"You think Mr. Selmin will return then?" she said.

"I'm sure of it, almost, at any rate."

"So am I. I've always had an instinct that he will," she answered. "I don't know how it is, but I have. That's strange, isn't it?"

"Nothing's strange. Shall I go further, Miss Enscott?" and he bent forward slightly, fixing a strong firm gaze upon her face. "I have another instinct, and that is that your brother will return, too."

Lauretta started, and stared at him. So did her father. There was a curious earnestness in Durward's face, a fixity in his eyes, which was rather—well, unnatural. He was not given to drink or drugs or nerves—they knew that well—but a strong, level-headed professional man, yet now he talked as though he were possessed of second sight. There was even a slight moisture on his forehead, as though some very unwonted mental effort had "taken it out of him."

"Well, what do you say to my idea, captain?" he went on. "Why not come down to Selmingfold for a change? You can send and receive just as many telegrams there as here—I'll see to that. The change of air and scene'll do you all the good in the world. Don't you think so, Miss Enscott?"

He had taken on his natural voice again, brisk, hearty, with just the faintest dash of the professional "for your own good" about it.

"I don't know, Dr. Durward," she answered slowly, but not decisively. "It's awfully kind of you. What do you think, father?"

"So it is—so it is," said the captain. "Awfully kind. Shall I let you know to-morrow, Durward?"

"Certainly. Don't feel in the least hurried. I want you to cheer up and try and look at things from the hopeful side."

Then he took his leave.

"That's a fine chap," said the captain, after he had gone. "So considerate, and helpful. Shall we accept his invite? Nothing much seems to matter now."

"Just as you like, dear. But remember what he said, and let's try and go on hoping."

Durward, as he went away, was marvelling to himself, at himself. It was one thing to buoy up their hopes with regard to the lost son and brother, but it was no part of his programme to do the same with regard to Selmin. Why, then, had he done the latter? He hardly knew.

The fact was that, in spite of the temporary deadenings of his conscience—we don't like the word, but there seems to be no other that will answer the purpose—when he rejoiced in possession of Selmingfold and the potentiality of possession of his other desire, there came times upon Durward when he was forced to tell himself—facing himself point-blank—that he was a murderer, and that, not in intention only, but in actual fact. When he was alone, the situation would crowd upon him and stare him in the eyes. He would willingly have foregone the first possession to have seen his relative back again—and yet that had been the first motive which had moved him in doing what he had done. But the other now had taken a greater hold upon him still. For were Selmin to return he

was certain that he himself would be nowhere, whereas, in the course of her bereavement, he knew he had set up a certain sympathetic interest with Lauretta that might turn to anything.

When he was alone! Yes. It was a curious, a weird and uncanny thing, and a fact, but that some strange consciousness of Selmin's unseen presence would come upon him, and it began to tell. So much so, indeed, that he had begun to recognise to himself, with very grave misgivings, that he rather shrank from being at Selmingfold alone. He had gone up to London for days at a time and had gone round hospitals with professional friends—he had not yet clinched up the negotiations for his new practice—just to throw off the spell. He had even thought of asking the Filgays down, if only to relieve his solitude and what it involved, but somehow the recollection of the girl had seemed to stick in his throat—she was too hard a trial for anybody—and he had not. Then had come his inspiration with regard to the Enscotts, and he thought they would come. And, if so?

He had got through the time, more or less in sport. He had shot the coverts and hunted occasionally. He had got in two or three county neighbours to take part in the former, but he was not feeling in the sociable vein, moreover they would keep putting questions with regard to Selmin, and that rather got upon him. He refused invites to dinner for that very reason, and grew morbid to a certain extent. This the aforesaid county neighbours saw, and grew suspicious of him.

Then came a note from Lauretta saying that she and her father would be pleased to avail themselves of his invite, and would come down to Selmingfold the next day unless they got a wire to the contrary. Her father, she wrote, was utterly broken down, and she hardly liked to inflict themselves on him She was afraid they would prove dreadful wet blankets. But she thought it would shake the dear old man up.

On receipt of this Durward metaphorically threw up his hat and hoorayed. Now his chance was coming. But, even then, when he met them at East Welstead Station, he noticed a wistful look in the eyes of the girl, which certainly did not relate to him. Even during the homeward drive, he did not fail to notice her glance from side to side, taking in all the familiar features of the way, and of course contrasting it with the last time—or times—she had traversed this very road.

And even when they were snug at Selmingfold somehow things did not seem to pan out the same. Lauretta seemed to shrink from going over the old scenes; Durward was puzzled. Had he made a mistake in getting them down here so soon? Was it a case of opening up old wounds? He ought to have put it off till later, he told himself. He had spoilt the whole thing by precipitancy. But he showed himself everything in the way of a model host, and he practically gave the household to understand that no trouble or pains were to be spared on behalf of these guests. Still, a couple of days had gone by, and still he wondered if he had

not rushed this scheme too soon, in fact, prematurely.

Lauretta thought her feet would have failed her, and that she would have dropped like a log on to the stone platform. The posters of the evening papers were staring her in the face. She had bicycled over to Steynhurst to get some of the said evening papers at the station bookstall for her father. Durward was up in town for the day on matters of urgent professional business. Now, as she approached the bookstall, she read:

"Fate of the *Tangipaho* settled.—Tale of the survivors."

She could hardly ask for a paper. She could hardly articulate. It brought back that evening, weeks ago, when she had seen those dreadful posters on the bookstall at Beacham Junction, two stations further on, and nearly at the same time. However, she managed to. Now, as then, the bookstall clerk looked at her curiously.

She sank down upon a seat and tore open the paper. This is what she read:

"TERRIBLE TALE OF THE SEA."

"The fate of the missing liner *Tangipaho* is now settled beyond all doubt. She foundered at sea during a record gale off the Cape some weeks ago. It will be remembered she was reported missing then, and that no trace of her has ever come to light since, although a cruiser was specially sent out from Simonstown to search for her. We hear now by our special wire, that the *Tarorua*, belonging to the same line,

was signalled by a barque bound to Western Australia and, standing by, took on board two men, presumably the only survivors of the doomed ship. They had been picked up in a small dinghy—not one of the *Tangipaho's* boats, for she was marked with the letter 'S'—in the very last stage of starvation and exhaustion, were, in fact, with difficulty restored to life at all. They had been tossing about for six days without one scrap of food or a drop of water. When able to give an account of themselves they proved to be Dr. Enscott, the surgeon of the *Tangipaho*, and a Mr. Selwin—or Selmin—a passenger. Both are strongly of opinion that the ship capsized, and that they owe their ultimate rescue to the fact that they were washed overboard by the enormous seas that were flooding the vessel just before this happened. They are proceeding to England by the *Tarorua*."

Lauretta sat there in the light of the indifferent station lamp, under which she had had to strain her eyes to read the paragraph at all, and woman-like felt as though she must laugh or cry. Was it true? Could it be true? Then she recalled her father's dicta as to the strange happenings of the sea. Why, of course it was true. And in the lightning flash of thought came the recollection of the other newspaper report, wherein they had confused Selwyn and Selmin. It could not be a mere coincidence. Yet what could he be doing on board an outward-bound Australian liner? Ah, of course! That was it. In a flash again, she saw light. He had been picked up and rescued by this ship, and he and her

brother had been picked up and rescued from *her*—the sole survivors. It was beyond all marvel.

The strange part of it is that it was now beyond all doubt in her own mind that the other of the two *was* Selmin—Selmin of Selmingfold. No, the thing was too marvellous, too utterly marvellous! And now they would be on their way home.

She must go back at once. Perhaps her father would have received a cable. But somehow she felt totally unequal to the physical exertion of riding her bicycle just then. She called a porter, had it put into the luggage-room, then sent the man across to the inn opposite to order a trap of some sort.

The same road she had driven over with Durward those weeks ago, she thought, as she looked up at the dim loom of the Downs in the darkening twilight. Then through a railway bookstall poster had come gloom and desolation and bereavement, whereas now through the same agency, double consolation. Yes, double—or was it?

The captain met her in the doorway, very excited, very agitated. He held a telegram in a somewhat shaky hand.

"Seen the news, dear?" he said. "Yes, I see you have. He's all right. He cables from Cape Town. I always said we must hope for the best."

"What about the other?"

"Eh? What other?" Then she told him. He whistled in amazement and gazed at her blankly. He had not seen an evening paper, was in fact waiting for her to bring one out.

"There's a cablegram for Durward," he said.

"Now I think of it, it came at the same time as ours, though ours was forwarded on here. I think—d'you know—I think we might be justified in—er, I'm sure Durward wouldn't mind, when we explain."

The girl's eyes shone bright.

"I'm sure he wouldn't," she said.

Durward's cablegram ran:

"Safe coming home by the *Tarorua*—SELMIN."

In the event Durward didn't mind, not about that, at least.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

THE tender green of early spring foliage was hanging over and around Laylock Pond, and the balminess of a windless day was in the air as the sunshafts networked down upon the surface. And the same rush and scuffle, and half-stifled, excited yappings up in the covert, showed that the same dogs were following the same unlawful pastime—chasing a rabbit, to wit—where they had no business to be doing so. Selmin laughed, then stopped and looked hard and gravely into the eyes of his companion.

"Strange how history repeats itself," he said. "Why it was here; on this very spot, that we first saw each other, under exactly similar circumstances."

"Are they so exactly similar?. Think again?"

The beautiful eyes that gazed into his were very soft now.

"No, indeed. I didn't mean to be taken literally. But even then I had a sort of instinct that they might be—well, similar to what they are now."

"Even then?"

"Even then." And both pairs of eyes met steadily, and both were soft. But in one pair there was just a shade of an anxious look.

Selmin was still showing signs of what he had undergone. The ghastly ordeal in the open boat, coming on top of his former cankering apprehension, had brought him through far less easily than his companion in adversity. He was actually looking several years older. But time, and complete peace of mind, might go far to modify that. Lauretta shook a doubtful head.

"Dearest, I am afraid you are still brooding over things that are past. Past, do you hear? Past entirely. And you are not to. Put them away."

"No, I'm not. I suppose I shall recover 'form' again soon. I'm bound to. Here I've got *you*, and nothing else in the world to wish for. Look at all this"—with a comprehensive glance around—"all this—ours."

"It seems too good, too good. Life itself seems too good," she murmured, as she thought, to herself.

For an answer an arm came round her in the silence and loneliness of the new-green spring woods, and the sweet bird songs piped and gurgled from everywhere. But there was no answer in words. They went on, past the boathouse, then to the head of the great pond.

"Poor little Fluff!" said Lauretta. "It was just close here that we found her."

"Yes. And what a terrible time I went through. I believe your brother was instrumental in saving me from—I don't know what."

For Lauretta had been put into possession of everything that had happened to Selmin. He had thought it only due to her that she should be. Now she answered.

"You are not to go back and dwell on that. Harry says that in one sense all that happened to you since was for the very best in your case, since it took you far beyond the limit of the time when that sort of thing could have taken any effect. And he says too that you were certainly instrumental in saving him, from—he does know what. He was just giving up, when you put your own lifebelt on him." And the dark lovely face raised to his, expressed a whole world of loving adoration.

"Don't make me more conceited over my swimming powers than I already am," he said. "Why, Harry himself paid a tribute to them when I was picked up in mid-Channel. It was easy enough for me, and we should probably have taken turn about with the corks again when he was rested. There's nothing to brag about over an ordinary pal-and-pal transaction."

"No? And that boat, and the sharks?" she went on. "You see, he's told me all about it."

"And you were telling me something else just now, my Lauretta, and that was that we were not to dwell on things that had happened. So don't let's."

She pressed his arm, and then they went on to talk about other things, wandering through the spring-green woods.

"Hallo, where are those rascals of dogs?" he broke in suddenly. "Never mind, old Dayson'll know better than to interfere with them. I don't know how he's been behaving while I was away, but they'll be safe now, at any rate. They'll turn up in their own good time. We needn't bother about them, or about anything. No, we don't want to go to 'Excalibur' Pool. I believe I feel superstitious myself on that subject this afternoon."

They went back, through the chorus of gurgling bird song—the cuckoo had not quite arrived yet. Out on the sloping meadow, where old Dayson was wont to do his pheasant-rearing, skylarks were soaring to the vivid blue, making choirs of harmony. On the lawn in front of the house, Captain Enscott and his son were hitting balls to each other across the tennis net.

"Just one," sang out the latter as they arrived, and a minute or two later they were all seated together on the path in front of the house.

"You can do a 'peg' after all that exercise, captain, and you too, Harry?" said Selmin. "Well, have you decided? Sea or shore?"

"Oh, shore," answered the latter. "I'm about fed up with the sea, after that last experience. There's a chance of a look in not far from here."

"That'll be capital," said Selmin. "We'll have

some jolly sporting times yet. Two good packs within reach. I hope you'll pull it off. I can always mount you if you want anything extra, and I'm going to work up the shoot considerably."

The table was laid out, and the tea urn steamed, and other things sparkled. It was too early for midges or wasps; spring, soft, balmy, delightful.

Durward was not there. He had accepted the situation, and with an astonishment which astonished himself, with a certain amount of relief. He was starting clear, and a certain load which had been weighing upon him more than he would allow, had fallen from him. He had thrown himself thoroughly into his profession again, but—perhaps for that very reason—he did not care to come to Selmingfold, at any rate for some time to come.

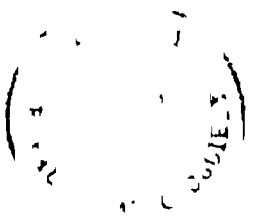
"Poor old Jack!" Selmin now remarked. "I wish we had him with us now. He's one of the best. But I expect he'll blossom into no end of a big swell in his own line before long. Eh, Harry?"

"I shouldn't wonder. He's got a name already over more than one very ticklish case. He'll do."

So they sat and talked on, in the sweet, clear, spring afternoon—with the green gold crescent of the Downs, Canonbury Link crowned by its wind-swept circular copse—then to the left, beyond the dip where Steynhurst lay, Croftonbury Hill, with its old Roman camp, and beyond that again Swaytheling

Beacon, and between, the roll of meadow and sloping woods. The gurgle of countless thrushes and the skylark song mingling with the bleat of new-born lambs and the caw of homing rooks. And in this paradise sat the happiest man on earth—Selmin of Selmingfold.

FINIS.



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